A HISTORY OF SOMBRA TOWNSHIP

by Maude Dalgety
1984

FOREWORD

This book was written to record Somhra Township's History up to the Bicentennial year 1984. This is one of the Bicentennial Projects for Somhra Township. The printing cost was provided by a financial contribution from the Provincial Government. Every chapter has been read by one other person and to the best of our knowledge, is correct. If any valuable information or names have been left out, it has been done inadvertently.

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Maude Delgaty
May 25, 1984

SOMBRA TOWNSHIP HISTORY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE — SOMBRA TOWNSHIP 1
Ferries 8

CHAPTER TWO — SOMBRA TOWNSHIP COUNCIL 10
Fire Protection 14
W. Darby McKeough Fleetway 15

CHAPTER THREE — INDUSTRIES 22
Former Industries 22
Present Industries 26

CHAPTER FOUR — COMMUNITY LIFE 27
Selkirk Grange 29
Sombra Township Agriculture Society 30
Women's Institutes 31
Lodges 32
Rum-Running 32
United Farmers Of Ontario 33

CHAPTER FIVE — VILLAGES 34
Becher 34
Bradshaw 35
Duthil 36
Port Lambton 35
Sombra 40
Thornyhurst 42
Wilkesport 43

CHAPTER ONE

SOMBRA TOWNSHIP

HISTORY OF SOMBRA TOWNSHIP

Sombra Township occupies the southwesterly corner of Lambton County and was the first block of land that the Crown acquired in Lambton County. Sir Peregrine Maitland, the Lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada 1818 - 1828 a veteran of the Peninsular War in Spain, named the heavily wooded township "Sombra" which is the Spanish word for shade. The surveyors found it so densely wooded, it shut out the light of day.

From the Land Surveyor's office in Queen's Park, Toronto — The Township of Sombra originally called "Shawnese Township in the Western District" was surveyed in 1820 by Deputy Surveyor T. Smith, who wrote "There are about three days work yet to do in this township — The men were worn out by sickness and fatigue and had to quit. Mr. Ballenger one of the assistant surveyors, I was dangerously ill. Perhaps there never was a more painful survey at the breaking up of the winter and the flat country along covered with ice and water three-fourths of the year. In this township, many the barriers along the river form no concern as deep are habitable. When these are settled, the rear side remains for the improvement of time."

Sombra Village was surveyed in 1854 by Henry Winters.

In Sombra Museum is the plan of a village called Lewisville with the name street names also those of Sombra Village. It was named for Lewis Burnham, who had a store on the corner of Smith and Water Street. He also had the first windmill in Sombra.

The westerly boundary of the township is the St. Clair River. The first white man to go up this river was LaSalle, the explorer in 1679. He was becalmed for a day on St. Clair's Day near the head of the river and named the beautiful blue body of water St. Clair in honour of the saint.

The river made the township readily accessible to pioneers and encouraged early settlement. It was the scene of the first white settlement in the County by French settlers from Detroit, followed by Loyalists from the States, Scots on the Selkirk Settlement at Baldoon and later numbers came from the British Isles.

Originally Sombra Township was united with Kent County for municipal purposes and its southern boundary was the south limit of the present Gore of Chatham. In 1826, deep in the sparse population, Sombra separated from Kent and was united to St. Clair (now Moore) Township with Walpole Island added for good measure. A number of white men had established themselves as squatters on Walpole Island. The treaty of 1827 set that area aside as an Indian Reserve so these whites were expelled and settled on the mainland.

In 1842 all the settlers elected Duncan MacDonald to represent them at the Western District Council at Bothwell, which was the centre of our Electoral District.

MacDonald petitioned that Council in May 1842 "for a road from Chatham to Wallaceburg and thence to the River St. Clair and along said river to the Township of Moore." A map of 1847 showing a road parallel to the river along all west Lambton, proves that his petition was granted.

To have a road was one thing, but to keep it up was another. Maintenance was by statute labour which was work on roads in lieu of taxes, for which they were paid to still this day. Men who looked after the roads were called pathmasters. Lack of sufficient gravel, heavy wet soil and frost damage made dreadful roads. For instance, sometimes the surface was so cold during the spring and fall that the priest from Port Lambton between 1812 and 1826 had to cross the river to Robert's Landing, drive to Marine City and crossed Sombra to conduct Mass in St. John's Church there. In 1834 the road was resurfaced for paving and moved back in places, notably through Sombra Village and south of Port Lambton and was paved in 1935 and completed in 1942.

The east coast settlements opened more rapidly than the roads for transportation. The Sydenham, named for Lord Sydenham governor of British North America, 1838 - 1841 only across a Sombra concession line. Between 1862 and 1903 five to ferries were in operation across it. After a bridge was built at Becher in 1931, two ferries ceased to run. Two more stopped after Dunhill bridge was built in 1950 and another in 1955. The last ferry — a hand-operated scow — ran to connect the east and west sections of the eleventh concession road until 1977 when Ernest Smith, the ferryman, retired. The crossing now has a large bridge built by the St. Clair Conservation Authority. Wilkesport bridge and the Sidereal was built in 1957.

Both the Sydenham and the St. Clair helped the settlers to dispose of their timber. On the St. Clair it was sold to steamers for the form of cordwood, while the output of elm and basswood along the Sydenham was floated to sawmills in Wallaceburg.

Although the cleared land proved heavy and hard to drain, except along Clay Creek and the Sydenham River, Sombra's leading industry has been agriculture followed by tourism and more recently by the production of fertilizers and chemicals. Modern machinery and more part-time farmers have resulted in 80 percent of the township being devoted to crop and for the raising of soya beans, wheat, corn, barley, small fruits and vegetables. Cash crops have been affected by the dredging of the McKeough Dam to prevent flooding at Wallaceburg. In 1984 they opened the dam, saving Wallaceburg from flooding, but Wilkesport suffered from high water.

Farming was the leading industry in 1880, when the township attained a population of around 4,000. That was more than double what it had been in 1871 and more than four times that of 1850. From 1890 on, the population declined to reach 2,681 in 1941. Since then it has increased and is now the largest it has ever been. In 1983 it was 4,274.

All Sombra Township was without a post office and one opened in Sombra Village in 1851 with Peter Cattanach the first postmaster. Shortly afterward William Henderson was the first postmaster at Baby's Point. When the post office opened at Wilkesport in 1852 the mail came in once a week on horseback from Louisville in Kent County.

Among the post offices named to honour Sombra Township people in addition to Wilkesport, for Charles Wilkes, and Baby's Point were: Becher 1871 - 1970; Thornyhurst, 1874 - 1914 and Henry's Corners, 1900 - 1914 and Dunhill, 1906 - 1914 and Avonroy, 1882 - 1912 were named for places in Scotland, and Chanelmont,

1892 1912 for a place n reland Pardee, 1910 1912 was named for F F Pardee a federal member for West Lambton from 1908 to 921 Bickford, 1895 1958 was named for an official of the Erie and Huron Railway. Another office named Terminus was open from 1892 to 1613. A local teacher named the Buzzy lle office which opened in 1971 Sombra Village, Port Lambton and Wikesport are the only ones st l open in 1984

Though it didn't have the first post office n the township, Baby's Point in the south-west corne was the earl est settlement It was named for the Francois Baby family, who came there about 1816. The French community which evolved built a church Sacre Coeu about 827. It was the f rst Catholic Church in the county. A log build ng w th masonry ends, served the Roman Catho ics of the township unt they bu l St John's Church n Sombra Village n 1870. The French Church was moved to Port Lambton and became a blacksmith shop.

By the 1870's the Catho ic population had increased considerably. A new church was needed to accommodate the population, as the "Little French Church" at Baby's Point was small and in need of repairs. A new large church was needed with perhaps a resident pastor to lighten the work load of the priest from Corunna. It was dec ded to bu d the new church n Port Lambton as the peop e were beg nn ng to sett e north of the point A p ot of and was donated by Mr John D McDonnald and his wife in June, 1877 The men of the parish cut trees to be sawed into lumber Much of the work was vo untary Th s church was built on the corners of John and Main Streets n 1880. The frame was of large square timbers, a large brick build ng. This church stood until 1965 when a modern new church was opened on the site of the old one.

A directory for 1869 notes that Baby's Point has stages to Wallaceburg and Chatham, steamers to Sarnia and Detroit. Concession 6 is named the Point Line from the name Baby's Point, popu ar at the 1800. M R Cain, proprietor of the Brit sh Hotel, James Menton, the postmaster and Rev Father Kilroy clergyman.

Father Kilroy was the priest of St. Michael's n Sarnia at th s time but served a number of points throughout the county as well.

A memento of Baby's Point, the key to the Église du Sacré Coeur is now in the museum n Moorelown. L tle else save the name of the old community survives. In Bombra Museum s a letter dated 1881 asking permission to have a priest come from the United States to minister to the parish.

The te egraph line went through n 1870. Lambton Telephone Company sold shares and n 1916 the South Lambton Company was granted a franch se to erect lines back n the township. The f rst switchboard went into Shepherdson's Hardware Store in May, 1899 Celia Shepherdson was the ope ator then it moved to Hargrove's Store. W lliam Hargrove was operator when the store was open and from two to four on Sunday Later it was located in a small st ucture n a house across from Hargrove's which has been torn down to make room for expansion of Baker Transit Parts Among the operators were the Keyser sisters, the Rowan sisters, Sadie Dell, Marian McRitchie, Grace Huey, rene Snaid and Jean Henry Many local men were linemen. Among them were Ed Thomas, Ed Ready, Tom Forbes and Harold Workman.

Ray Hedegard was the last lineman when Bell took over about 1960. The original switchboard is in Sombra Museum. The system went on dial October 2, 1957.

Hydro was turned on in Sombra Village in 1924. It came later to the back of the township.

Old Highway 40 was opened in September 1936. New 40 went through in 1977 at a cost of 18.4 million dollars for 23 miles.

The Parkway Commission was set up in 1955. Four parks in Sombra Township are well patronized. Cathcart Park, at the mouth of Clay Creek, was named for Hon. Bryan Cathcart, a member of the Legislative Assembly.

Land was donated on the west side of the highway by Harry Cundick in 1957 to make a park. It has a beautiful bathing beach and tables. Gordon Branton, as ex-warden, worked with other ex-wardens to get the property east of the highway for the Lambton-Curiosity Park. It has a large trailer park at the back and picnic tables at the front and is very popular.

Reagan Park, south of Sombra, was named for Dan Reagan, a township road maintenance man.

Bender Park, south of Port Lambton, was named for a very fine druggist of Wallaceburg. He started the Rose Trail along Highway 40.

In 1903, Sombra became a police village and remained so for 70 years. By 1973 the village tax base was not large enough to provide the street and sewer maintenance that was needed. It voted to rejoin the township, where industrial taxes allow for better service.

In 1895, the Huron & Erie laid the rails from Sarnia to Chatham; and in March, 1858, the first passenger train went through. Mr. George W. Smith was the first station agent in Sombra village and the first ticket clerk are in Sombra Museum. A man paid 55 cents for a ticket from Sarnia to Tupperville, in March 1896. The Pere Marquette was the next owner. Chesapeake & Ohio owns the railway today. The last passenger train was in April, 1934.

Natural gas came into the township in 1917. Mr. Alex McRitchie had an implement shed next to Hargrove's Store. He and Mr. William Ansell set up a depot for the installation and repairs of gas services for the homes here.

Along the wells, they drove in pieces of pipe to hold larger lengths of pipe of various diameters and they had shown, pipes which were to be arranged in order over the floor space. They themselves did not actually install or hook up the services, but they entered into contract with the prospective customers and Mr. William Henry, who acted in the way as a ferret, went about the different houses to make all the connections needing in from the meters. Many houses had gas lights until hydro came in 1924.

There were four street lamps in Sombra village and Frank Stover got 25 cents a week for lighting them.

On Christmas morning, 1920, Ed Mullins, the janitor at the Sterling Bank in Sombra went into check the building and found the gas out. He went to light the stove down in the basement. The leaking gas ignited and blew him up to the

I rst floor the building was flattened and windows n s t the buildings nearby were broken Mr Mull ns had no injuries, just s nged eyebrows and ha r

The bu ding pictured below replaced it

Installation of sewers n Port Lambton and Sombra was started in 1974, and the process of laying sewers on back streets cont nues to the present time.

Sombra and Port Lambton had the r own pump ng systems with frequent shut-offs and the taste of ch orine prevalent at times.

In 1977 the water l ne from Lake Huron was c ted, so now we have water pleasing to the taste and seldoms shut-off It cost $2 6 m llion It was constructed by Aztec Contractors and has a capac ty of 2,900 gallons pe m nute.

The township bought water from the pipe ne at a cost of 75 cents per 1 000 ga lons. Each household was charged $225 for hookup.

SCHOOLS

1962 was the last year of the one-room schools. The Province declared larger schoo areas with bus service.

In Sombra Township, two areas were e stabl shed the east half and the west half. The East Sombra School was opened in 1963. The Trustees elected were Garnet Brunton, Robert McGee, George Davis, C arence Shaffer and William Crowe; and they appointed Bruce McCallum Secretary-Treasurer.

In the west portion the school named Riverview Scho l was o pened in 1964. The Trustees were Grant Watson, Gordon Elcum, Jack Beggs, Sam Wesley Allan El ot. Clarence Moffat was appointed Secretary-Treasurer.

Then the Province made the township into one school area and the Trustees elected to the Township Area were Grant Watson, Gordon Sloan, Jack Beggs, Garnet Brenton and William Crewe and Clarence Moffat was appointed Secretary-Treasurer.

In 1969, the Province decreed there would be only County Boards and all assets were to go to the County and that Sombra Township and Dawn Township together would be allowed one representative to the County Board. Representatives have been: Grant Watson, Joanne Highfield, Lorne Smith, Kenneth Baker.

In the first World War the boys of Sombra Township answered their country's call and enlisted in the 149 Lambton's Own Regiment. Many of them spent months in Camp Borden before going overseas. The men from Sombra Township who served in the first World War were, along with others:

Charlie Bishop
Archie Bishop
Beattie Chalmers
Pte. Hugh A. Allan
Sgt. Emin Smith
Sgt. George Smith
William Fox
John Tulloch
Walter R. Browning
Sapper Fred Myers
Major Jim McRae
Cpl. Hugh McRae
Allan Dale
Frank McRae
Norman Breed
Gunner John Luckmann
Louis Henry
George Johnson
Clifford Stokes
Harold Stove was in the Air Force
Guy Forbes
Sapper Ernie Shove
Cpl. J. H. Seaman
Ivan Young
Lloyd Shepherd
Howard Beggs
Wm. McAuley

In the Second World War they enlisted in the Army, Navy and Air Force. Those serving in the Second World War were, along with others:

Jack Hart
Jack Yorke
Joe Card
Warren Hargrove D.F.C.
William Andersann
Harold McKittrick
Frank Dunn
Murray Ellis
Donald McKillican
Capt. F. C. McRitchie
Mac Henry
Sam Plato
Joe Gormley
Robert Minnie
Charlie Washburn
Oscar Yorke
Richard Henry
Donald McRitchie
Ken Wilton
Bob McPhail
Russell King
Clifford (Tuffy) Davis
Harry Reedy
Gordon Sterling
Harry Barnes
Ray Hazzard
George Kerr
Sheldon Browning
Robert Buckingham
Gordon Tulloch Albert
Clarence McKnight
Will Dennis
Grant Watson
Austin Harley
Walter Harley
Andy Poland
Cy Salisbury
Richard E. Brown
Wilbur Little
Reg Knox
Kenneth Browning
Charlie Hunter
Leslie Tulloch
Bert Huey
Alfred Henry
Warren Henry

FERRIES
PORT LAMBTON FERRY

Before 1850 Henry M. McDonald of Port Lambton ran the first ferry from Port Lambton to Roberts Landing. He used a row-boat holding four or five passengers, then a sailboat.

George Bradley also rowed passengers over for five cents each way.

John D. McDonald bought the business from Henry McDonald and ran the He le H a steam ferry.

George Roberts was the next owner. He was the first ferryman at Port Lambton to have a gasoline motor launch "The Pilot". It was built in Detroit and it took him two days and a night to bring it up from Detroit. After he sold the business, he became Customs Officer at Roberts Landing, which was named for his great-grandfather, a pioneer of Michigan. Notes from George Roberts's widow: In May of 1901 people were out ing the fields, but the ice in the river was so heavy that freighters and a passenger boat "Mary" were stranded in the ice in front of Port Lambton. The crews ran out of food, so some hardy souls made the r way in land to replenish the galleys, and Port Lambton grocers and butchers did a heavy business while the ice remained."

Julius Cook of Detroit owned the ferry and his two nephews, George and Charlie Davis of Port Lambton operated "The Jewel" about 1903 1908. This docked at the White Star Line dock beside the Dunemere Pavilion. Many passenger boats such as the "Tashmoo" and the "Hiawatha" docked here for excursion passengers to Stag Is and or Tashmoo Park.

William Radford of Roberts Landing owned the business in 1914. His two sons, Ray and Roy operated the "Re ssine" a gasoline launch.

He sold to Jim Anse of Port Lambton, who ran the "Owl".

In 1919 Wallace Dawson of Port Lambton bought the business and operated the ferry with the help of Herbert Roberts. At this time motor cars were getting more plentiful and Wally Dawson had a townscow bush to carry four cars. So Herb Roberts brought the first car ever on the scow pulled by the launch "Owl" a one cylinder Gray marine engine.

Ed Dawson assisted his father and they had motor driven scows built — the Larry D." and the "Lu"

John Jo son worked on the Dawson Ferry for ten years. In 1936 John and his brother Pete bought the business. They bought the "Ontamich" in 1973. "Ontamich" is a combination of Ontario and Michigan. Later John left the partnership and in 1939 Pete sold the business to Lowell Dagety of Sombra.

Customs officers were Hugh Deming, Art Mickle, George Logan, Gilbert Nixon, Randle Purser William Hinnegan van Young Scotty Pearson and Roy Clark. Now the Customs and Immigration officers alternate between Walpole Island Port Lambton and Sombra.

SOMBRA FERRY

Before 1880 Samuel Whitely started the first ferry from Sombra Village across the St. Clair River with a sail boat named the "Silent". When there was no wind, he used a row-boat. He charged ten cents a round trip. In the winter when the ice was not at safe, he had a boat with iron runners on the bottom to shove over the ice; then when they came to open water they all got in and rowed across.

After Samuel's death in 1888 his son Tom Whitely took over and used the same boats until he got a small steam ferry called the "Comfort". Captain William Dale ran the ferry for Mr. Whitely, also Moses Doan.

The rail road went through in 1885. After that many people crossed on the ferry, and then took the train to their destination. Freighters came into dock; also wood-burning vessels used the dock here to load up wood.

William Ball also ran a ferry at the same time from a dock in front of Washburn's Hotel. He started about 1854 and ferried over thirty years. He used a sail boat named the "Marion" but later converted it into a gasoline fueled boat. The launch "Marion" burned at the dock on August 19, 1912 when the gasoline tank exploded. He then had the R. R. named after his son, Roy Ball. It was also a motor launch. Mr. Ball went out West for three years and sold his business to Earl Johnson of Marine City. When Mr. Ball came back, he bought his business back but soon he took sick and sold his business to Joe Miller of Marine City.

There was great competition between the two ferries run by Joe Miller and Tom Whitely. The Canadian Customs Office stood on the river bank in front of Wm. Stover's Office and Joe Miller ran his ferry from a dock at the foot of Smith Street. Arguments arose because Tom Whitely was a Canadian and Joe Miller was an American. Things became so bad that one day each ferry was only allowed to go to the middle of the river. The Ferrymen came to terms because the passengers didn't like changing boats in the middle of the river. The ferries were to run on alternate days. Finally Mr. Whitely bought out Joe Miller so there was only one ferry business after that between Sombra and Marine City.

Whitely's first motor boat was a converted yawl named the "Whitely". Mr. Whitely built his first tow-scow about 1912. This carried a team and wagon and later one car. Then he built one to carry two cars.

The cement block Customs house was built in 1919. For many years the life-sized lion on top of the Customs office was a land mark, put there by Tom Whitely who died in 1933.

Custom's House & Dock — Sombra, Ontario

In the 1920's, the launches were "Miss America No. 1" and the "Cadillac". There were two tow scows carrying four cars each. Tom White's son, Delos, assisted his father on the ferry boats and a large motor launch was named the "Delos W." Delos White's body was drowned off this boat in 1934. The business was then sold to an American, Frank Johnston, and he bought a motor-driven scow named "The W.I." to hold six cars. This did away with tow-scows.

On August 8, 1947, the pilot of a small plane had been making short flights with his plane until around 6:30 p.m. when he secured the plane at the dock in Marine City, Michigan.

The seaplane NC 2306 was a 65-horsepower Aeronca — 7 A. C. S. At 7:10 the pilot decided to fly his plane to Pearl Beach to moor it for the night. He then swam out his mooring line and found same in good condition. He proceeded to turn on the gas and on both magnetos and crank the throttle and then step out on the pontoon and crank the propeller. The motor of the plane failed to respond at first and the operator continued to make alternate adjustments and cranking the propeller until finally at approximately 7:45 the engine and belly started, and at that particular instant large swells, caused by passing motor boats, were rolling in and caused the seaplane to bounce. The bounce and sudden forward motion of the plane when the engine started put a severe strain on the mooring line and caused same to part. The forward motion of the plane threw the operator off the pontoon into the river. He tried to hang on to the pontoon but the sharp metal edges cut his hand and prohibited him from holding on.

The plane then taxied out into the river and after making several more circles in the river headed directly toward the ferryboat "Wil". At approximately 100 yards from the ferryboat, the plane struck some swells which caused it to bounce three or four times, with the next bounce sending it aboard the ferryboat. It struck the propeller came to rest on the after end of the vessel, with the motor still running.

The motor vessel "Wil" had aboard some 30 passengers and a crew of two, plus one automobile. Said vessel was on a scheduled trip from Sombra, Ontario to Marine City, Michigan, at the time of the collision. There were no personal casualties aboard the "Wil".

The "Wil" then completed her crossing and moored at her berth in Marine City where the plane's operator came aboard and shut off the plane's engine. The seaplane was last inspected at the Detroit seaplane base on 26 July 1947 and the pilot had 600 hours successful flying time.

The present dock at Sombra was completed in 1940. The Customs office was built in the next year and in 1941 the officers moved into their new quarters. When the office was moved to the government dock, the old office became a residence and the station was taken off by Hans Werner who had bought the business from Frank Johnston. Mr. Werner kept the business only a short time and sold it to Morgan Dalgety and George Dean in 1946. The "Wil" was named the "Ariel D." and registered in Canada. The "Ariel D." was sold and the "Lowell D." was put into service here until the "Baldeun" was built in 1951. This was built at Erisan and brought up through Lake Erie, Detroit River and Lake St. Clair. This was a large steel ferry carrying twelve cars and one hundred passengers.

A new Customs house was built in 1873. Customs and Immigration Officers were Andrew Mullins 1873-1884 Asa Crank, 1884-1893; Henry Rowbank, 1893-1897 Alexander A. Meyers, 1897-1907 John Burnham, 1907-1923 Harold Stover 1923-1926 Other officers were William Laing, who later moved to Ottawa; Stuart Clark, who died in 1973 Harold McKillican, who died in 1981 and William Anderson. Now the Customs and Immigration officers alternate between Walpole Island, Port Lambton and Sombra.

Other Customs Officers up to the present time are:

Arthur Meers, retired	Thomas Atkins	Al Sterling
Henry (Jumbo) McFadden *	Douglas Christopher	Bob Gross
Gerald McConnel	Roy Clarke *	Bob Oliver
Harry Reedy	Don Crundwell	Herb Stephenson
Henry Lauzon	Murray Huckle	Nick Frigis
Robert Sterling		

* — DECEASED

April 1954 was a month like never before. The winter of 1954 was one of the hardest winters felt in these parts with the thermometer hovering near 0°F in January. On January 21 the radio said it was the coldest day of the century. So much ice was made. February was a lovely mild month and everyone hoped we wouldn't pay up for it in April, but we did.

The North wind blew for days and there were thirty miles of ice on Lake Huron. River St. Clair filled with ice and Sombra ferry didn't run from April 6 to 29. It was one of the worst ice jams in history.

Freighters were stranded in ice from Harsen's Island to Sarnia. Ice breaker "Mackinac" and Coast Guard Cutters had to escort the freighters one by one through the ice. The "Des Groseilliers" from Montreal came to their assistance. The Coast Guard created one way traffic each day. On Easter Sunday there were sixty ships waiting in the District River to come North twenty in Lake Huron to go South and ten at various places in the St. Clair. The coast lights ping companies was in the millions.

CHAPTER TWO
THE TOWNSHIP COUNCIL

The first official recorded municipal organization was in the year 1822. Sombra Township and Dover Township were united, and there was listed in that territory: 6 frame houses; 1 stone house; 103 horses; 154 oxen 226 cattle. The assessors for that year were Dennis Drouillard and John Hamilton. The tax collector was Robert Crow.

The council first met at homes. In years 1851 and 1852 at Robert Mowbray's River St. Clair 1853, Wm Henderson's, Baby's Point; 1854 James P. McDonald, Baby's Point; 1855, in 1857 Alexander P. McDonald's Baby's Point; 1858 and 1859 John Kerby's Sombra.

From then on the council met as follows: 1860, Good Templar's Hall, Sombra; 1861 and 1862 Sombra House 1863 to 1867 Good Templar's Hall, Sombra. There were two meetings held in Wyoming in 1867 on May 11th and November 4th.

In the year 1867 a town hall was built in Sombra Village. The first meeting was held in it December 30, 1867 and met regularly there until 1965. In the year 1868 about one half of the meetings were held in the town hall and one half in the Central Hotel, Wilkesport.

From 1886 the meetings became fewer in Sombra Village, until in 1892 the regular meetings were held in Wilkesport until 1967 when the Municipal Building was built south of Sombra Village. Meetings in Wilkesport have been held at:

1892	– Hayes Hall	1911 to 1914	– Regan's Hall
1893 and 1894	– Jenning's Hall	1916 to 1917	– Lorengan's Hall
1895 to 1899	– Shaw's Hall	1918 to 1921	– Hamilton's Hall
1899 to 1901	– Richmond's Hall	1921 to May 1950	– Women's Institute Hall
1902 to 1909	– Hamilton's Hall		
1909 to 1910	– Mason's Hall		

In the year 1950 an extension was built on the Clerk's office at Wilkesport and the council met there from May, 1950 until 1967. The town hall at Sombra was sold to George M. Shepharsenn in the year 1897. The clerk's office was built at Wilkesport in the year 1918. The clerk's office is now the Library in Wilkesport, opened in November 1951.

Here is an excerpt from December 1852 minutes: "Moved by Mr. Kimball, seconded by Mr. Merritt that the electors of each ward be paid the sum of ten shillings" (Note the spelling when "pounds" was used the word) Shillings currency was used until 1857. The school grant for the township in 1852 was £14.12.1 1/2.

In 1864 Council met at the home of James F. McDonald, Baby's Point. Another excerpt from the minutes: "Inspectors of Houses of Public Entertainment — A. W. Watson, 1st Ward; Duncan M. McDonald, 2nd Ward; Lionel Stewart, 3rd Ward; Hiram Little, 4th Ward, David Grayson, 5th Ward. Estimate of current expenses of the Township of Sombra in 1864 was £91 16 2 1/2. One pound, Twenty Shillings was paid to James McDonald for the use of a Council room in his house for one year.

In 1866 Council moved to pay eight dollars a month to a destitute person when he needed it. The names of Samuel Whitely, Andrew Mullins and Jacob Bingman appeared in the minutes. Fell into "playing" the Council in open roads were granted by a by-law. Two thousand dollars was at the disposal of Council for improvement of roads and bridges in the township. (Note the difference in 1864.) There were 350 names on the assessment roll of whom:

"8 are twice placed there

11 are women

12 whose values are not good

2 are aliens

1 under age

1 dead

4 who have left the province."

Needless to say the voter's list was corrected. The treasurer's salary was $60, clerk's $100, Assessor $60, tax collector $100 and auditor $5 per year.

In July 1850 $42 was apportioned for planking a part of the River Road in front of the south half of Concession 11

We call the east and west roads concessions, but the concessions are really pieces of land conceded to the land owners and the roads take their number from the concession north of them. Thus this piece of road just planked would be Sombra Village South.

In 1859 a petition was sent to the Attorney General with regard to widening the road along the St. Clair River after it had caved in and been set.

In 1860 a by-law was passed for the regulation of Taverns, Houses of Public Entertainment and stores selling liquors. The Council granted $1,000 to distribute seed grain to farmers of the township who were in need of assistance. The December 1869 meeting dealt with setting the size of S. S. No. 12 and No. 10 also exempting the parsonage in Sombra from taxes. Rev. M. Morden was the minister

The population was 1,485 and there were but four taverns in the township as Samuel Whitely was granted one for the Sombra House

In March 1861 Tavern licenses were granted to John Kelly and John High and Council received a petition from farmers on Concession 11 saying their lands were covered with water because ditches on Concession 11 and 12 were dug wrong.

On June 24, 1867 there was a mot on by Andrew Smith that $50 be paid to M. L. Bernham for plank for a dewalk in Sombra Village. In September 1867 tenders were opened for building a Town Hall in Sombra, there being three tenders as follows: William Knight $1,792, A.A. Meyers, $1,600 and Aaron Kirby $1,350. Mr. Kirby's was accepted. Two town lots had been bought from John Hannegan for $130 and Henry Winters had been paid $25 for drawing the plan and specifications for the hall. Mr. Forsyth, township clerk and Jesse Holt were named a Commission to be inspectors. The first Council meeting in the new hall was December 1867

In 1868 Tavern licenses were issued to Sam Whitely, James and Wm. Morden, Messrs. Cain and McEvoy, Jos. Adare and Angus, and John Kelly. Shop licenses were issued to Daniel Dawson and James Henderson. County assessment was $1,268.72

In 1870 James McNulty was granted a tavern license in Port Lambton.

The Council furnished posts and the first telegraph line was built from Wallaceburg to Port Lambton and Sombra in the year 1870

The Reeves of Sombra Township were:

1850 Lionel Johnston
1851 William Kimball
1852 A.P. Toulmin
1856 Denis Meyers
1857 William Kimball
1857 Robert Mowbray
1858 James Dawson
1861 A. P. Toulmin
1862 William Kimball
1863 A. G. Tennant
1869 James Dawson
1872 Peter Cattanach
1873 William Kimball
1874 J. S. Burnham
1875 Andrew Smith
1876 William Kimball
1878 Henry Winters
1879 William Kimball
1880 J. D. McDonald
1888 J. W. Shibler
1889 Peter Grant
1897 Neil Grant
1901 James Bowles
1906 Thomas Boothman
1909 Hall McGuigan
1912 Hall Grant
1916 John Huey

1920 Alfred Seaman	1942 Clarence Moffat	1970 James Moran
1922 Victor Green	1947 Harry Shetler	1974 Lorne Johnston
1924 Edward Armitage	1950 Gordon Branton	1977 Dean Hunt
1927 James Huey	1957 Shepherd McCallum	1995 Joseph Dorlecker
1938 Samuel Carruthers	1964 Gordon Branton	

Sombra Township Reeves who have held the Office of Warden of Lambton County are:

A. F. Toulmin	John Huey	Gordon Branton
James Dawson	James Huey	James Moran
Peter Grant	Shepherd McCallum	

John Huey was Clerk of the County from 1920 to 1950.

For Sombra Township's Centennial effort, the beautiful large Municipal Office was built south of Sombra Village in 1967 when Gordon Branton was Reeve.

Clerks of the Township have been:

1864 W. Paterson	1878 Arthur Hendersen	1922 Edgar Henry
1864 Peter Cattanach Jr.	1885 Orra Bishop	1926 Roy E. Bradshaw
1868 Andrew Mullins	1903 William McGhee	1972 Maurice Burke
1874 John D. McDonald	1913 William A. Scott	1983 John DeMars

The longest standing Clerk of the Township was Roy Bradshaw. Mr. Bradshaw began his long association with Sombra Township when he assumed the Treasurer's position in 1925. He moved up to the post of Clerk a year later.

Author of a book on the municipality's history and procedure, Mr. Bradshaw was well-acquainted with the municipality's history and procedure. He knew the township well and had a vast amount of information at his fingertips.

In September, 1962, Township Council honoured Mr. Bradshaw with an 80th birthday celebration at the Port Lambton Parish Hall.

Mr. Bradshaw retired in January, 1972 and he died on May 24th., of the same year.

Sombra clay has been the butt of much ridicule and was the concern of the Council for many years.

Prior to 1931 the roads in the township were of clay except the roads which had been designated County roads and had gravel. In the early 20's the Kimball Sideroad was paved as far North as Lambton Line. Having lived on the Lambton Line, half a mile from the Kimball sideroad, I remember one Spring the mud on the Lambton Line was hub-deep and that pavement was so near, so my brother hitched the team to the car, pulled us through the mud, tied the team in S. S. No. 26 school yard and we went to Wallaceburg by car to do our shopping.

Prior to this, ditches constructed on the side of the road served two purposes, to drain the adjoining lands and also to build up the road.

When automobiles became more numerous and they could only be used in dry weather (they were jacked up in the garage during the winter), people began to think that better roads should be supplied. When the Government collected license fees for autos, they returned a portion of the money to the township in the way of a grant for road maintenance.

In 1938 Sam Carruthers, who was seeking to be Reeve, presented the people with a program whereby he would put gravel to everyone's property and it would not cost over five mills, by using the subsidies from the Ontario Government. The people in the township accepted his proposals and for six years the Reeve and Council were returned by acclamation. That was the foundation on which later councils have continued to build and improve township roads.

In 1942, Sam Carruthers was appointed Road Superintendent and continued in that capacity until 1955. Other Road Superintendents were:

Clifford (Tuffy) Davis	Ronald Johnson
Oliver Dawson	Sam Dunseith

Another resident who has served the township well is Clarence Moffat. In 1919, he became Secretary-Treasurer of Carlisle School and remained so until he became the Township's Central School Board Secretary. It became a County School Board in 1958 and Clarence was retired. He was on the Sombra Township Council for fifteen years, serving five years as Reeve. He belonged to the Firemen's Association and received a plaque from them after serving them for thirty years.

FIRE PROTECTION

In 1946, ratepayers in the Southwest part of the township asked the Township Council to form a Fire Area bounded on the north by the centre of the 10th Concession, in the east by the County Line and the west by the St. Clair River. The first committee appointed to manage the Fire Area was: Percy Johnston, William McNeil, Howard Myers, Glen Payne. The committee arranged with the trustees of Port Lambton Village to operate and man the area equipment and Dan McEvoy was named Fire Chief. In 1946 a position he continued to hold until 1983.

The remainder of the township was designated as Fire Area No. 2. Fire protection was arranged for Area 2 by buying the services from surrounding Fire Areas such as Fire Area 1, Moore Township Fire Department and Tupperville Fire Department until 1966 when Fire Area 2 decided to provide their own protection and built a Fire Hall at Wilkesport and bought a pumper fire truck.

In 1975 further protection was provided by building a Fire Hall at Reshers and the purchase of another pumper truck.

In 1981 an addition was built onto the Wilkesport Hall. Now in 1984 the township has three Fire Halls with four pumper trucks, two emergency vans and eighty volunteer firemen.

Fire Chiefs in Area 1 have been:	Dan McEvoy, 1946 - 1983
	David Moran 1983 -
In Area 2	Jack Swain
	Harold Romph
	Wilbur Shapley
	Owen Watson, now for 12 yrs.

When Area No. 2 went for their own protection the committee was:

Cy Jackson
William Hurley
Earl Peters
Clarence Moffat

Sombra Township's Council in this Bicentennial year is:

Reeve:	Joseph Dedecker
Deputy Reeve:	William DeMars
Councillors:	Lorne Graham
	Steven Miller
	Romaine Vandevenne
Clerk	John DeMars
Treasurer	Jean Watson
Engineer	Larry Burnham

W. DARCY McKEOUGH FLOODWAY

Probably the biggest, most controversial issue ever to affect Sombra Township was the project originally called the Wilkesport Dam and Diversion Project. Although the general public first learned of it through a special four-page insert in the newly formed Wallaceburg Courier Press in December 1972, the Sydenham Valley Conservation Authority's Project No. 55, as it was called, was well on its way on paper.

A preliminary engineer's report had already been completed by August 6th, 1971 after a request to the Authority from Wallaceburg on April 1st, 1970 to undertake a feasibility study to construct a dam and diversion south of Wilkesport on the North Sydenham River. The Authority approved the undertaking of the study on April 14, and received a $25,000 Provincial grant June 10th, 1970 for the said study.

This Dillon Report described a flood control project involving a dam 28 feet above normal water level at Duth[illegible], an 800 acre reservoir and a five mile diversion channel travelling from just north of the dam west along the midpoint of the Tenth Concession to the St. Clair River. The report suggested two alternatives for the channel: navigable and non navigable. The first choice preferred by the Dillon engineers involved a wet channel as an extension to the reservoir at an estimated cost of $6.4 million. The second had a dry channel except during floods at an estimated cost of $5.5 million, excluding land acquisition and final engineering.

On August 31st, 1972 the Authority adopted alternative No. 1 as Project No. 55, conditional that the non-grant portion (45%) of the project was cost-shared by the benefiting municipalities: Wallaceburg (80%), Chatham Township (10%) and Sombra Township (10%). On October 19th, 1972 the Authority submitted a brief requesting the Minister of Natural Resources' approval of the now $8 million project. This proposal involved the acquisition of 460 acres of land for the diversion channel plus 1,300 acres for the "lake" and five feet of free board (558' level). The rest up to 587' (Hurricane Hazel level at the dam) would have a flood easement bought. The purposes outlined were flood control, recreation, stream flow augmentation and pollution abatement. Sombra Township's share was to be $27,500 over three years. However, on December 22nd, 1972, no approval was given by the Minister as "funds are not available at this time."

This was the time that the previously mentioned Authority-sponsored Courier Press insert arrived in the homes of Wallaceburg and Sombra Township residents. It described the project as the best solution for eliminating flooding in Wallaceburg with added recreational features like sandy beaches, blue water and sailing boats. The last point alone was enough to plant the seed of suspicion in those who knew the clay-bottomed, silty Sydenham, so they attempted to get information including

the D llon Report from the Authority Lorne Henderson, M P P and Sombra Township council. After obtaining e ther little n no informat on from e ch source and being fed extra co ies of the D llon Report were hel evaluate . a group of Sombra ratepayers cal ed S.O.S. (Save Ou Sydenham) was formed with President, Wa ter Scott; V ce-pres dent, Paul Graham; and Secretary, Robert Sauvé with the hope that a group would be more effective.

Meanwh e on March 5th, 1973 the Authority appointed a special Steering Comm ttee whose p urpose was to further Phase I (Land Assembly 1973 - 77) and Phase II (Final Engineering and Construction 1978 - 79) of the project. They proceed on obta ning approvals from Wal aceburg and Cha ham Townsh p Counc ls, support from Le no Henderson, Lambton M.P P and Darcy McKeough Kent M.P P and nondfi nal acceptance from the M nisters of Natural Resources and Environment — one cond tion be ng that the Authority must meet with Sombra Township. Aerial mapping and photography began in May 1973 after a $2,500 Provincial grant was approved.

The S.O.S. group requested a meeting with the Authority before it was any further committed to the project, but were told there would be no meeting until the mapping study was completed. S.O.S. now felt that due to the nharanter of the river the reservoir would take thousands of acres of prime bottomland out of production to be rep aced by nutrient and stagnant water, and had to now nce the Author ty to drop the lake idea and prefer ably the whole dam project. On July 16th, 1973 they presented the r Counc l with a 1,048 name petition of Sombra landowners oppos ng the dam because of "oss of bottom and disruption of trains, tax increases and debris entering the St. Clair River. The Authority f nally agreed to hold a meet ng on Ju y 23rd, 1973 with the S.O.S. execut ve who p resented them with a copy of the petition opposing Project No. 65 and w th an alternate flo bo nontro p an for Wallaceburg inc ud ng some le dams at each bridge, removal of the Center Bridge in Wallaceburg and dredg ng of Running Creek and the mouth of the Snye. The proposal was immed ately rejected as being too cost y and ineffect ve. The Authority was very upset with the S.O.S. for not waiting until comp letion of the study.

On Ju y 27th, 1973, word came down from Toronto "the project s postponed ind nitely." The S.V.C.A. stated it would go on with the study and then tried to meet with Sombra Township Council, who refused as long as the project was postponed. S.O.S. e ec ded to cont nued their battle with lobby ng letters to government offic als and non-Wallaceburg media coverage to get support to stop the project forever — not just indefin tely. The S.V.C.A. used the Wallaceburg media to defend their pos tion. The l nes were drawn. The bitterness had begun.

S.V.C.A. then y arranged a closed meet ng with Sombra Townsh p Council and an open meet ng afterwards on December 17th, 1973 at East Sombra Central School. The D llon engineer was there to explain the project to a gym full of Sombra people, some S.V.C.A. and M.N.R. officials and a few biologists, naturalists and an invertebrate zoologist f om Toronto, Sarn a and Ottawa, respect ve y who were concerned about the water quality and depth of the reservoir. However the eng neer announced that the Authority had dropped the lake idea and opted for the dry diversion channel.

The Authority aga n wrote up another brief for M.N.R. approval in January 1974. This one included only the dam and dry divers on channel, and changed the

land acquisition to 450 acres for the channel and 100 acres for the dam site and flood easements only above the dam north to the Avonley Road to the 597 elevation — still at a total cost of $6 million. Wallaceburg and Chatham Township requested the S.V.C.A. to proceed with Phase II. On February 6th, 1974 Sombra Council held by James Moran met with the landowners directly affected by the project and decided to strongly oppose the project. S.O.S. tried to convince the S.V.C.A. members by letter that the project was too costly both monetarily and socially, that the engineering data was incorrect and that Wallaceburg would not flood.

At the S.V.C.A. Annual Meeting on February 21st, 1974, the Authority members voted 16 to 9 against proceeding with Phase II. Wallaceburg now threatened to drop the Authority.

The Sydenham Valley Conservation Authority changed their name to the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority (S.C.R.C.A.) September 1974 they approved Tedgham & Case of Chatham as surveyors and Ford, Grey & Simmons from London as appraisers. In January 1975, the province approved a $1.25 million grant for Phase I.

By February the cost of the project was up to $10 million and Sombra Township's 10% share was up to $67,600 over three years. Reeve Lorne Johnstone & Council opposed the costs on the grounds the project was of no benefit to Sombra Township. He also wanted Sombra out of the Authority. To cut costs, the Authority tried to change the easements to include only their predicted extra 300 acres of incremental flooding rather than the original 2,600 acres affected. On October 22nd, 1975, Wallaceburg agreed to pay half of Sombra's share. An O.M.B. Hearing was held January 16th, 1976 to hear objections and O.M.B. approval was given February 12, 1976 for Sombra to pay its 5% which was now $62,500 over three years.

Surveyors and appraisers spent summer on the affected properties on the channel and above the dam. Then the Authority hired James Mason of Sarnia as negotiator No. 1 to present the offers to the landowners. All the channel landowners sold to the Authority except one George Frye, at the west end, would not sign off his property for the offered price; so it was expropriated. Over two years later (August 19th, 1980), the Land Compensation Board granted him almost double his original offer.

With the landowners above the dam mistrusting the Authority's intent one also deciding there was probably more strength in unity they formed the Wikwemikong Dam Landowners Association in May 1977 with an executive of Paul Graham (President), Stan Yaki (Secretary) Alex Lecky (Treasurer), Charles Grant (Negotiating Committee Chairman), Malcolm Crawford and Richard Aarssens (Negotiating Committee members). The group made several attempts to meet with the Authority regarding the easement policy the intentions. One representative was finally allowed to attend a meeting in Strathroy in August, 1977. The easement policy gave the Authority the right to flood the land — which was too permanent for the landowners and could not be resolved. They also suggested the dam would be closed on average of once every six to ten years.

After Mr. Mason signed up only three properties out of about 120 the Authority registered the easements against the affected lands about April 1976 and notices of intent to expropriate the said lands. The landowners immediately hired solicitor William Tennyson, who objected to the expropriation on their behalf.

The Authority arranged the v ew ng on May 14th, of several thousand do ar dam model bn it by the D lton eng neers n Windsor o all the Authority members and politicians. When asked by the landowners executive if they could go, the Authority was reluctant to allow more than a few members to see it. Sn h early May, a few landowners executive members met with Lorne Henderson seeking help to get information from the Authority and request ng a viewing of the dam model for all the landowners.

The Authority then gave the r solicitor instructions to release of information on the project with a request on. They also invited the landowners to a separate May 29th viewing of the model. A meet ng on May 20, 1976 was also arranged between the landowners executive and Authority techn cal staff and advisors. Subject discussed were the easement document, l and ng effects even with the gates open, compensat on, and the static flood line which did not allow for any back ng of water during flooding so that all the land to be flooded was not included n the easements. Moore Townsh p landowners fell into th s category and began to organise the same end. However, the Authority and M N R would not change the static line, the easement policy, or anything else, and continued on to the Hearing of Necessity to be held November 30th, and December 1st, 1976 where the landowners' objections would be heard.

September 8th, 1975 was the sod-turning ceremony. Sod, shrubs, a tent and chairs were set up at the west end of the proposed channel for the occasion. Guests included Prov nc al dignitaries Lorne Henderson, Darcy McKeough, Frank M l e (Treasurer) and James An d (M N R.) and Authority members and po licians. The event followed by a lavish luncheon on Fawn e and. Also attend ng the sod-turning were several un nv ted placard-carry ng landowners peacefully demonstrating aga nst the Authority's unwill ngness to sincerely act on their concerns before the construction started. The digging of the channel began a few days later.

In November 1976 the project's name changed to the W. Darcy McKeough Dam and Diversion Project.

The Hearing of Necessity was postponed due to the illness of the hearing officer in November 1976 and then on December 1 the hearing was postponed indefinitely by the Authority to re-assess the amount of acreage needed for land easements. In 1979 the Authority and M N R had decided to re-survey and re-appraise the entire flood plain, but this time to the dynamic regional storm line, which would accomodate a Hurricane Hazel type storm including the backwater curve. The new area went north to Highway 80 in Moore Township and involved 150 properties. On April 16th, 1979 Sombra Township Council objected to pay ng their share of any fur her acreage, and recommended that the land be bought out and resold with the easement attached to the deed. The Authority decided to acquire the floodplain land in l eu of easements.

Moore and Sombra landowners joined together in April, 1980. Sombra Township Council appointed two Councillors, W lliam DeMars and Joe Dedecker as liaisons on the landowners committee; but at a meet ng in May, arranged and chaired by Dean Hinds between the Authority, Water Control Board and the Landowners' Executive, the liaisons were not allowed in. It was decided that the new Authority negotiators No. 2 should meet with the landowners' negotiators again, which they did — three times. The landowners requested a choice of either easements, sale of affected land only or total buy-out of the parcels as each

landowners wished. They again requested changes in the easement document, written guarantee that there would never be a permanent lake, right to retain subsurface rights and right for vendor to lease back land taken from the original parcel. They also wanted answers regarding affected roads and bridges and concerning buildings not the floodplain but subject to flooding due to water backup.

The Authority addressed some in November 1980 when the Authority tried to get an Order-in-Council to lease-back purchased lands to the vendor to 1990, but by January, 1981 they reverted back to predominately easement acquisition — with one very more restrictive easement document than the first one. They had run into problems with severances (parcels less than fifty acres and the legal description of the flooding on each parcel).

By this time, the first four contracts worth over $3 million were completed. This involved the digging of the five miles of channel and building the drop structure at the west end and three bridges over the divert on channel. Also, the 11th Concession bridge costing over $750,000 which was financed almost totally by the Authority was opened in November 1980 by Lorne Henderson and Dean Hunt. This Bridge was but it in lieu of a bridge over the diversion channel at the Callahan Sideroad.

The second survey of land above the dam was completed in February 1981. The appraisers and negotiators were left each property and when the landowners at Powerdam began off the Authority again applied for approval to expropriate and in April 1981 three years after the first attempt. The landowners now hired lawyers John Coates, expropriation expert, and Stephen Waqué, of Riordan and Elliot in Toronto with the assistance of Rael Sarna lawyer Wallace Lang. The lawyers attempted to negotiate a settlement with the Authority without a hearing, but that was fruitless and the 54 landowners proceeded to the Hearing of Necessity which was November 30th to December 9th, 1981 (7 days) at the Wilkesport Community Centre. In the meantime, the Authority changed the project to the W. Darcy McKeough Floodway.

The basic purpose of the Hearing was to determine whether or not the taking of the lands or an interest by way of easement was fair, sound and reasonably necessary for the purposes of the Expropriating Authority. The hearing officer sent a lengthy report to the Minister of Natural Resources, who handed down his decision the end of March, 1982. He requested a change in the wording of the easement document and also easement acquisition rather than total buy-out of some properties that the landowners wished to retain. Only the buildings on these properties were to be bought out and removed. The landowners were pleased with the results.

Once the Minister made his decision, the expropriation was officially locked in. On June 26, 1982 the Expropriation Plans were registered on the title of the affected properties. According to the expropriation timetable, the Authority was bound to make each landowner a Section 25 offer (offer of compensation) within three months i.e. September 29th. However on 3rd September, the Authority asked the County Court for an extension of six months since the appraisals weren't finished. Lawyer Waqué objected on behalf of the landowners at a hearing in Sarnia September 23 and 24 where he discovered the appraisals were done but MNR wanted to review them. The Judge ordered the Authority to further make the

Sect on 25 payments by October 4th he would grant them an extension to the end of February, but they must include pena ty interest at the p ime rate. The Authority chose to pay n y these landowners with ou id nea by October 4th, and a pealed the rest. Those with notices were to vacate by November 30th 1982 but the Authority granted them a h extension to August 30th, t 83

The next few months involved three different co urt battles with the Authority lawyers oppos ing the Judge's o der to pay penalty nterest and the landowners' lawyers trying to quash their motion of appeal. The Court granted the Authority their appea but the Section 25 payments were still not made by February 28th 1983 so they we e legal y bound to pay nterest back to the date of a propriation June 28th, t 82 wh ch they had sought to avoid s long

By the end of February, the M nistry of Government Services took over t l the apprai sals, negot at ons and land assembly matters from the Authority and would deal with the landowners themselves. They would now cons der total buy-outs as well as the easements, wh chever the landowners prefer ed. They were also w ng to pay some legal and a praisal fees for the landowners wh ch they were legal y bound to do eventua ly. Some landowners elected to sell out and move. A few w e refused. The majority preferred the easements To date, some haven't been paid their Section 25 offers yet. Mr Wequé has hired agr sioners and eng neers in prepara on for the f nal court batt e n the Land Compensation Board.

Sombra Townsh p Counc l also had its problems. Late n 1980 Counc l became concerned a bout the lack of Authority action regarding the upstream roads and b dges. The Authority insisted that a report would be made afte the final des gn of the dam had been set. In May, t 81 the Authority dentif ed several areas they fe t needed upgrading and suggested that M N R would pay only part e costs. On October t 4th 1981 the Authority and M N R. met w th Sombra, Moore Township and Lambton County officia s to beg n talks. All the m nicipalities fe t that the upgrading of roads and bridges should be at the expense of the Authority or M N R s nce the h gher more frequent flood ng would be due to the dam. Concerns were a so expressed over Wi kesport being an island the cemetery flood ng and future ma ntenance cost of the roads and bridges due to the flooding. In December t 81 the Authority and M.N R agreed to pay for a preliminary investigation of the roads and bridges affected by the project. Letham and Jarvis Engineering Firm of Sarnia was comm ssioned to prepare th s report of Sombra and Lambton County. Terms of reference were established and field examinat ons were made.

On March 16th, t 82, Ken Jarvis produced his preliminary find ngs concerning the areas of most concern and covers design criteria. He identified eight Townsh p and five County local ons, all n Sombra Township that needed upgrading for f ood ng. The Townships requested 100% fund ng of the upgrad ng and a haul road agreement to be f nished before construction of the dam commenced. By May, 1982 Jarvis had established a cost est mate of the above for both roof ng at $1.9 m lion for the Townsh p and $4 m lion for the County. In Ju y, 1982 the Authority refused to pay Jarvis's total bill for the preliminary investigat on. Then in August, they asked Sombra and Lambton County for a list of priorities since they intended to carry out about $1 m lion worth of roads and bridge work by March, 1983. The l st was made. The work was never done.

On November 4th 1982 the first meeting was held over the proposed haul road to the dam site. The Township wanted a written agreement signed that only the 10th Concession Road between new Highway No. 40 east to Duthil Bridge would be used, that the road would be maintained during dam construction and left in good condition when finished and that the Authority would pay for legal fees incurred because of the said agreement. Authority officials seemed agreeable and suggested that the road would probably be needed during the half load season.

Early in 1983 the Assessment Department dropped the assessment on flood easement lands by 60%, which was a loss of revenue to the Township.

Contract No. 1 (construction of control gates) and Contract No. 2 (construction of control gate housing, control structure, 700 metre earthen dam and concrete bulkheading) were let in February 1983 for over $4 million. At a pre-construction meeting in Wallaceburg on February 17th, the contractor told Sombra he would need to use the 10th Concession Road from the Kimball Sideroad to the St. Clair Parkway as a haul road and wanted the haul load ban lifted immediately. Neither he nor the Authority would sign an agreement. Sombra Reeve, Joe Derlecke, and Deputy Reeve, Bill DeMars, told them they could not use the paved portion of the 10th or the Duthil Bridge and that the haul load limit would not be lifted until an agreement was signed.

A Toronto lawyer hired by Sombra Township wrote up a haul road agreement and tried to get the Authority to sign this and an agreement to bullproof the upstream roads and bridges, but had no success. By March 8th, 1983 the contractor was using heavy equipment over the 10th Concession Road to the dam site. Council members watched the contractor and the Authority to stop the hauling until the agreement was signed. They had no intention of signing any agreement and would not stop the hauling, so the Council asked for the help of Ministry of Transportation and Communication who immediately stopped the trucks. Not only were they overloaded for the Township roads, for the Provincial Highway No. 40 as well, so they were lined and turned back to London, loaded. The truckers then refused to go in the dam site until the dispute was settled. The Authority still would not sign, but the contractor was interested. However by April 5th, 1983, a written letter of commitment was signed by all parties involved and the load limit was lifted on the 10th Concession Road from the Kimball to Highway No. 40 exclusive of Duthil Bridge. By June, the Authority refused to pay the lawyer's account as was agreed to in the letter and wished to have it taxed. To date, the account hasn't been taxed and the Authority hasn't paid.

On September 12th, 1983 the Township and County were presented with Dillon's Position Paper on upstream roads and bridges for their review. This paper was prepared after studying Jarvela's preliminary report. In short, Dillon changed the terms of reference that had been agreed to and felt only $321 000 worth of work needed to be done. The Authority also wanted the Township to sign a release form agreeing not to hold the Authority responsible for any future damages. The Township said "No way".

The Township and Authority reached a basic verbal agreement on November 29th, 1983 with both parties backing down somewhat. This went to M.N.R. for approval.

The end of 1983 brought some good news and some bad news for Sombra. M.N.R. officially stated that Sombra would have to pay no more land acquisition costs. The bad news came when the Authority voted for Sombra to pay 5% of the Authority share (45%) of all future maintenance costs on the floodway.

Today, Sombra Township has a beautiful, expansive dam north of the 10th Concession bridge (Duthil Bridge) 30 feet above normal water level. The dam has a grave road on top with bolded sides with steel gates and concrete control house. The Authority has developed a $356,000 site plan for this area, which includes a paved road across the crest of the dam, a maintenance road, caretaker residence, interpretive centre, equipment shed, parking lots, interpretive trail, forest management area, boat launch, ramp and dock, agriculture demonstration plot, wetland impoundment area and tree planting along the diversion channel as open.

Since 1960 the Authority has been gaining some revenue by renting out the berms of the channel for crops and hay and the bottom of the channel for hay only. They also lease the lands they acquired above the dam.

To date the roads and bridges problem has never been settled, the bulldings in the floodplain have not been removed, the Wilkesport and Duthil Cemeteries haven't been floodproofed, some landowners haven't been paid and the Township lawyer hasn't been paid for the haul road agreement. Transfer of the dams took of floodplains to Minister were all on February 15th, 1984.

Yet, on February 14th, 1984, with only a draft operating manual to follow, the Authority closed the gates for the first time, creating a pool above the dam that had never been seen before. The two cemeteries were flooded, the Kimball Sideroad and County Road 2 were closed, as well as Township roads. Water well were covered and houses outside the flood line were flooded through water back up.

On March 12th, 1984 the Authority had told Sombra Township that the Ministry of Natural Resources has no funding available for floodproofing roads and bridges. The project has cost the Province over $30 million, including legal, survey and engineering fees and still isn't finished yet.

CHAPTER THREE

INDUSTRIES IN SOMBRA TOWNSHIP

FORMER INDUSTRIES

When the settlers first came to Sombra Township, the land had to be cleared of trees so they could build their houses and work the land.

Sawmills were set up at many places — Port Lambton, Sombra, Bradshaw and Wilkesport. At first grain was taken to Sarnia to be ground, but grist mills soon were set up in Port Lambton, Sombra and Wilkesport. The big grist mill in Sombra Township today is owned by Russ Hazzard at Hooker.

The Sicken Lumber Company, located in Sombra Village on the corner of Water and King Streets, was very active in 1910. The Sickens were Marine City residents. They built several houses on King Street, east of the highway in the early 1900's. These houses were all built from the same plan.

There were cheese factories at Becher and Sombra. The Becher factory was owned by J. S. Fraser of Wallaceburg. The cheese maker was Reg Watts of Wallaceburg assisted by Chris Whale of Sombra, and the book-keeper was Mr. Fraser's daughter Helen Rose, who later married Mr. Herb Burgess. She rode her horse, Barney, back and forth to work. When the factory closed, the building was sold to William Gibbons Jr. where it can be seen on Norman Workman's farm on the Lambton Line at Becher.

The Sombra Cheese Factory was owned by shareholders. In 1851 one share could be bought for $25.00. The president was J. S. Burnham and the secretary was A. A. Knight. In 1858 the president was John H. Soper and the secretary William S. Howell. The cheese maker was Dick Richmond, assisted by George Whale.

When the factory closed, Mr. Gordon Delgety bought the building in July, 1896 and used it for the Thistle Rubber Type Works in the making of rubber stamps.

Sombra Cheese Factory

He was assisted by Raymond Smith, William Duncan, Myrtle Hamilton, Mary Traxler and several other employees. Miss Clara Meyers did the office work. The office was over Shepherdson's Store until he bought the cheese factory.

The cheese factory had stood on piers out over the river. Mrs. Delgety had it moved to her property at the end of St. Clair Street where the road turned and came out to the river. When Highway 40 went through in 1935 the building was moved further east on her property but now facing the new highway where it stands today.

After the death of Mr. Delgety in 1913, Mrs. Delgety and Miss Meyers, with the assistance of Bill Duncan, carried on until the elder son, Murray, took over in 1919.

Murray died in 1963, and Morgan carried on, with the assistance of Mrs. Harriet McKillean, until the end of 1974 when ill health forced both of them to quit. In 1975, Mrs. Murray Dalgety sold the building and contents to Mr. Jim Templeton of Port Lambton.

There was a box factory managed by Mark Stover along the dock west of the Sicken Lumber Company. Here they put paraffin on card board boxes to ship oysters or ice cream.

After Mark Stover was killed in a motor accident at Delaware, Ontario, the building was used as a beer scow until rum-running days ended in 1933.

In 1936 Harry Stewart bought the building for a barn and Jim Hagan moved it down the ice to its present location on Gordon Stewart's farm along the Snye. That's when the River St. Clair really froze over.

When the ice in the rivers got to be ten or twelve inches thick, ice cutting was the order of the day. Huge squares of ice were cut and hauled by team and sleigh to the ice house to be covered with the saw dust that was piled up in the yard after the buzz saw had cut up the logs, the men had hauled in for the next year's wood supply.

William Anes had a Livery and Dray barn on Smith Street. Many people rented horses and buggies before cars became plentiful.

J. W. Callaghan was undertaker and embalmer in Sombra on the corner of Water and Smith Streets. He also had a good livery in connection.

J. W. Callagham Livery & Undertaking

Tom Hayes was undertaker at Wilkesport until he moved to Sarnia.

Jim Green and Hiram Stover made cement blocks east of the railroad track in Sombra, about 1906. They made pillars for porches, stabs and small blocks about the size of bricks. In 1916 these blocks were used in the building of the Grand Union Hote and Joseph Stover's house.

Stover House

Later two other houses were built of these blocks in Sombra.

The Sombra Outlook was printed in Sombra from 1908 - 1914 by Harry Moore, who also bought the Courtright Sun

Sombra Outlook

Sandy Campbell had a shoe repair shop in the small building at the entrance on Main Street beside Ansell's former livery stable. People coming in on the train or crossing the ferry often rented a horse and buggy from William Ansell to take them to visit relatives in the country.

Mr. Sid Hn mer and Mr. Leu Reynolds had chicken hatcheries north of Sombra. People from all over the township patronized them.

Sombra clay is slippery and sticky when wet, but it has qualities that make it excellent for tile and cement blocks.

The tile factory at Wilkesport started by Harvey S pere about 1904 supplied work for many of the young men in the vicinity and supplied tile to drain this wet township. William Bishop bought the tile yard and he and his sons operated it before the boys joined the army. Then John R. Douglas owned it. After Mr. Douglas died, the Ra stone bought it and finally Tom the B1 Colborne. In 1967, they sold the equipment to Empire Clay in Chatham. Then in 1968, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Graham bought the property and raised pigs there. This land was expropriated for the dam and was under high water in 1984 when Wilkesport flooded.

PRESENT INDUSTRIES

LAMBTON PIPE & SUPPLY

When oil was discovered in Sombra Township and oil wells dotted the landscape, Turret Supply opened in centre in Sombra where the old station stood, who supplied pipes and fittings for oil wells. Jim Huctwith, Jim McKenzie, Lea Warth, Peter Bouyen and Alfred Henry worked there.

Turret Supply ceased in 1965.

In 1971 Lambton Oil and Enterprises Ltd. started their own company with approximately twelve Oil Well Drilling Contractors.

In 1976, Don Lee bought the company and now he and his two sons, David and George, operate the business known as Lambton Pipe and Supply.

CHINOOK CHEMICAL

In September 1965 sod was turned for the Chinook Chemical Plant on Concession 10, Canada's only methylamines plant. It manufactures methanol and ammonia to form three types of amines. Its world-wide customers use these chemicals to produce antibodies and other pharmaceuticals, in nature printed circuit boards for electronics, the wide range of colours and colours in textiles, sensitizing agents for mining explosives, urethane fabrics and upholstery, weed and insect control products, the swimming pool purification products.

It employs 29 local people.

LIQUID CARBONIC

Liquid Carbonic is the world's largest supplier of Carbon Dioxide. This plant, situated at the corner of St. Clair Parkway and Moore-Sombra Townline, is one of the largest plants in Canada and they are planning on expansion. For years they supplied oxygen to the local hospitals.

CANADIAN INDUSTRIES LIMITED

C-I-L — Lambton Works is an integrated chemical fertilizer operation located just south of the Moore-Sombra Townline. The plant itself occupies approximately 400 acres of a 2,600 acre site and manufactures a complete line of nitrogen

fert lizers and some of the phosphate fertilizers. The basic raw material is natural gas from Alberta and this is converted into ammonia in the plant which is rated at over 1 000 metric tonnes per day.

One of the unique products manufactured at Lambton Works is sulphur coated urea which is a slow release nitrogen source used in a premium quality domestic fertilizers.

A portion of the ammonia is also used in manufacturing two grades of ammonium phosphate and as a by-product from this operation they also manufacture hydrofluosilicic acid, an agent used in the fluorination of municipal water supplies.

Lambton Works is the base unit of an extensive C-I-L agricultural system which includes a large number of downstream Agro Marts. The Agromarts are blending operations supplying custom admixtures of nitrogen phosphate and potassium for direct sale to the farming community.

In the construction Lambton Works started in the Fall of 1965 with first product being made early in 1967. At the present time the plant employs approximately 435 people in a wide variety of technical, process and maintenance activities.

EDAPLAST

After World War I William Dahm started a business in Sombra as Edaplast. They made photo corners and Scotch tape. After he moved to Ireland, Sombra Welding, owned by the Lajoie brothers and Joseph Kennedy, bought the property and employed many local people. Sombra Welding went out of business in 1979. Bernard and Marcel Lajoie started Bessemar Manufacturing Co. in the same building. The name "Bessemar" was made up of the first letters of Bernard, Sombra and Marcel.

In 1983, Townsend & Bellum amalgamated with Bessemar and the Bessemar Division continued to operate at the same building until the end of December 1983. They now use the building for occasional emergency work only.

For years it was the biggest industry in Sombra.

CHAPTER FOUR
COMMUNITY LIFE

Early settlers enjoyed the friendship of their neighbours and needed their help. Women acted as mid-wives because doctors were far away. There were no telephones and it took hours to drive the horse and buggy to summon the doctor.

Bees were the order of the day. Quilting bees, threshing bees and barn-raising bees. Every farmer had a wood-bee in the winter. When the buzz-saw moved into the yard, the neighbours came and the sound of the saw told you there would be a big pile of wood in the yard to be chopped for next year's supply.

In the fall, there were the cider parties when the young people brought their picnic lunch, and the apples through the cider press and ate their lunch and drank cider all in the Fall sunshine. During Fall and Winter there were husking bees in the barn with a good hot supper to follow. In the spring the maple syrup was made, and they had a sugaring off in the bush.

At barn-raisings, the men chose up sides to see which side would get their frame up first; so they could get to the supper first. The farmer's wife had worked and baked for days getting ready for the horde of hungry men. The neighbouring women and girls all came to help set the tables in the yard and serve supper.

Barn Raising 1913

Ice boating was a great sport on the St. Clair River. The sails on a boat with runners were the power that carried the passengers at a fast rate up and down the river or across the river according to the set of the sail.

Traffic across the ice was heavy with foot passengers, sleighs or cars. After Christmas in Sombra Village, Tom Whitely would collect the used Christmas trees and stake out a safe path to Marine City.

Without radio or television people made their own entertainment. Sombra had a band and every village or church put on Christmas Concerts or plays after Christmas. Many fine talents showed up in amateur plays.

Sombra had a race track for several years around 1900 on the farm now owned by Gordon Brant Jr.

Ice Boating

At The Races — Sombra

There was also a brass band in the village. Some of the members were Amos Henry, George Logan, George and Walter Meyers and L. Burnham.

September was often looked forward to in country school section when a new teacher was coming in the school. Many a young teacher married a farmer in the section and so became a good member of that community.

In 1933 the Hamsworth races were run on the St. Clair River. Many men along the river front bought lumber and erected stands and printed tickets for one dollar per seat, for the hundreds they expected to come and view the races. The visitors came in to view the races, parked the cars and walked to the river bank and stood to view the races. Many men had lumber for which they had no use.

SELMAN GRANGE No. 999

This organization was formed in 1925. The members were called Grangers and were Patrons of Husbandry. They met in School Section No. 11 then met in Wilkesport Hall.

It was a cross between a lodge and an agriculture society. The members were addressed as Brother Henry and Sister Grant. They were a close-knit society, because one entry states: "We the Division Grange of West Lambton having heard the case referred to by Bro. Brown of patrons selling goods to outsiders, would strongly recommend that goods bought through the Grange ought not to be sold to outsiders on any terms, believing that it was never intended by the Constitution of our Order."

Addresses were given on School taxes, Organization of Farmers and Essays on Gardens.

At every meeting they spoke about lunch which was often a feast of fruit of all kinds.

Some articles in the Constitution are "Regular dues shall be ten cents per month for male members, five cents per month for female members and two cents a month for Juniors to be paid quarterly. No member shall be entitled to vote or receive the password who is in arrears of dues."

Mrs. David Bowles was Flora among the officers in 1897. John F. Rivers and Frank Rivers were members. The members had to be voted in and they were called Co-ops store.

The Society's extra notes were recorded in December 1908 and all money in the Treasury was to be sent to the Treasurer of the Dominion Grange in Toronto.

SOMBRA TOWNSHIP AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY

In the late 1800's a Township Agricultural Society was formed for the purpose of having a fair. The first minute books are missing but the January 1900 meeting is recorded as being held in Richmond's Hall, Wilkesport. Robert Stokes was president and W. A. Grant was secretary. An amusing excerpt from these minutes says the secretary-treasurer's salary will be the same as before or smaller with a conscience as directs.

Directors for the Fair were named and judges named for all classes from horses and cows down to fancy work and fine arts. Many meetings were held in Henry Stokes' Hall, Sombra which was over his store which is now Hargreaves. Sarnia, Brigden, Wallaceburg and Somers were to be canvassed for donations and prizes.

Names of directors in the early years were Henry Stokes, Green, Boothmen, Ben Gispoke, Wilhelm, Pretty, Orra Bishop and Alonzo McLean.

The June 1902 minutes names Clara Boothman and Mrs. Maggie Cox as judges, Ben Gibbons — in charge of the hall, Alonzo McLean, tickets and gate; F. S. Jepp, grounds. Judges were Dr. Stanton, Mrs. Rev. Barkers and Mrs. A. E. Jones. Rent of $10 went to W. McGhee.

William McRae, who lived where Verne Fournier lived, sold the grounds to the fair board. The hall was built and the grandstand later.

The January 1903 meeting was in Richmond's Hall.

The July 1903 meeting was in Hamilton's Hall. Names appearing this year were Mrs. Walton, Ed Rollan, Robert Payne and Fred [illegible].

Names in the 1905 minutes were Manley Stubbs, George Shepherdson and Heddle. Membership was $1. President Lyman Henry died in March 1905.

In 1906 secretary-treasurer W. A. Grant's salary was raised from $30 to $45 a year. An annual grant was received from Council.

In January 1907 there was a motion to establish fair headquarters at Wilkesport. W. A. Grant was delegate to the Western Association of Fairs in Toronto.

1908 lady judges were Mrs. Wes Porter, Becher, Miss Cora Wakely, Sombra.

W A Grant was secretary-treasurer from 1900 to 1914 after which James A. Grant of Bickford held that office until Leo McCoy was secretary in 1919.

These copies of prizes in 1917 might be of interest: S. D. Cathers, Wallaceburg — $2.00 worth of dry goods; Brander's Drug Store, Thos. Hepburn — coal; Courtney & Burningham — a rocking chair; Merchants Bank of Canada; T. D. McGuire; John Glendinning, M. Golleghy; G. E. Norman; Cousins Bros. Grocery; O'Flynn & Burgess; L. H. Burgess, restaurateur — a box of candy; Sauvey & Sauvey; T. L. Johnston — a half dozen photos; Herald Record — one year's subscription to the paper; T. F. Hunegan, Wallaceburg; Bank of Nova Scotia, Brigden. L. H. Burgess ran supplied refreshments at the fair stands for several years.

In 1917, Mrs. Wm McRae from whom the grounds were bought, was to be interviewed regarding tapping title deeds. Apparently nothing came of it because in 1918, a committee was to see in regarding the grounds. S. A. Helmer was to be paid $10 to plough and smooth the race track.

In 1919, motion was made that Council proclaim Fair Day a public holiday.

They also decided to interview the Aerial Department, Mount Clemens, about having an airplane for Fair Day. Nothing came of it.

Unfortunately the minutes are missing between 1919 and 1937. At that time, James H. Grant of Bechers was secretary. Names are now Bernard Marr, G. M. Deyo, Herman Bloom, Miles Peters.

In March 1943, they voted to continue the Fair for the duration of the War but an amendment to that motion was carried and the Fair was discontinued, but the Board continued to meet and in 1944, motion was made to rent the Fairgrounds to Verne Fournie for three years for $40.

In May 1948 at a special meeting motion was made by Orie Bloom, seconded by Clayton Workman that since the people are taking no interest in the Fair or meetings, that we dispose of the grounds and buildings and cancel the books Carried. The township now uses the property for gravel, trucks and campers.

WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

Women's Institutes have been a great source of enjoyment and entertainment to the Country Women, and they have contributed much to their communities. The first Institute was formed at Stoney Creek, Ontario by Adelaide Hoodless in 1897. Offshoots of Women's Institutes is the 4-H Club and Junior Farmers.

When Lord Tweedsmuir was Governor-General of Canada, 1935—1940, his wife, Lady Tweedsmuir realized that the history of our country was disappearing as the older citizens died, so she suggested a worthy project to worthy group and suggested that the Women's Institute of every community collect and write the history of their community. The Institutes agreed and named the histories "Tweedsmuir Histories". It was a wise suggestion and today the Tweedsmuir Histories are fascinating and true histories of our communities.

There were Institute organizations at Becher, Wikesport, Port Lambton, Sombra and Thornyhurst. The only active ones remaining in 1984 are Becher and Thornyhurst.

LODGES

There were Orange Lodges formed at Berthe and Wilkesport and one in Sombra in 1863. The longest surviving was Souther which had a Ladies' Lodge also but they both ceased in 1974 and the books were sent to Grand Lodge.

Masonic Lodge was organized in Sombra in 1991 with Henry Roebuck the first Master. Masonic Building was erected in 1901.

Oddfellows Lodge in Sombra was organized in 1888. Gordon Daigety was the first Noble Grand.

Eastern Star organized in 1909. Mrs. Wm. Stover was first Worthy Matron. This was the second chapter organized in Ontario. Members had previously attended in Marine City.

Rebekahs organized in 1919. Mrs. Manley Stubbs was the first Noble Grand.

RUM RUNNING

During the Prohibition days in the United States from 1919 - 1933 other boats besides ferries carried on a cross-river business. They operated boat houses or shipbuilding close to the river and they were called beer scows. They were stocked with liquor and strung out along the St. Clair from Point Edward to Port Lambton. The liquor came in by train to the station and was picked up by various men who carried it to the beer scows. Sometimes fictitious names were used to enter liquor even names from cemeteries.

As long as the liquor was exported, Canadian Law was not broken, so many row boats and motor boats left the Canadian shore after dark, carried with liquor presumably for Cuba, but never got further than the American shore.

Floyd McPhail was the owner of a garage in Somerset and he was an excellent mechanic. When a rum-runner had trouble with the engine of his motor boat, he would seek out Floyd for help. Floyd charged his regular patrons 75 cents an hour to fix their cars or tractors, but these big-time rum-runners would pay as much as four dollars an hour if he could get that motor running by dark. Floyd loved engines and he was able they had some beauties in their boats.

An amusing story is told about a farmer who picked up his order of "booze" at the station and took it up to the corner of the 12th Concession where a boat was waiting. Before he let them unload, he demanded his money. They paid him, unloaded his wagon, then pulled a gun on him and demanded their money back. He went home wiser and poorer but that ended his purchasing of liquor for the rum-runners.

In 1926, there were thirteen beer scows at Port Lambton. The assessor made a special trip to Port Lambton for the purpose of assessing the beer scows which had been doing business for the four or five previous years without contributing to the Township treasury by way of taxation. One of the village trustees asked the scow owners to contribute toward the upkeep of the roads which were being used to transfer the goods by wagon and truck from the Railroad Station. The idea met with opposition on the grounds that action was up to the County Council as Front Street formed part of the River Road, which was a County Road.

These are a few excerpts from Auld Lang Syne.

May 1928 — The caretaker of the Kellner export scow north of Sombra was relieved of $200 in cash and liquor when four masked men entered the scow around midnight, making their getaway in a launch.

February 1929 — The firing of several shots by a couple of "bootleggers" who had been apprehended by the law on the Michigan side and made their escape across the ice to the Canada side, sent a hurry-up call to the Provincial Police at Sarnia. Following in pursuit of the bootleggers was a large car occupied by a couple of Port Lambton "temporary Citizens," who were commanded to halt by Officers Scott and Elliot who had quickly arrived on the scene. Several shots were fired which fortunately missed their mark. When the Officers found a couple of cases of liquor along the road, north of the village, they were placed in the Officers' car.

When the police returned to their car after inspecting certain premises, they found their prize had mysteriously disappeared. One bootlegger after spending the night in a nearby straw-stack walked over the P.M. tracks to Sombra. Next day he returned to Port Lambton and while visiting the beer scows along the waterfront was picked up by the police and taken in Sarnia jail.

March 1929 — One Saturday night an American Patrol Agent, Earl Roberts, was fatally shot by a bootlegger from Lambton County. The shooting took place near Algonac.

When Mr. Roberts and another officer attempted to apprehend the man with a boat loaded of booze, Roberts was shot in the stomach. He body crumpled into the boat and its owner raced toward the Canadian Shore with the injured man. After dumping the man on a Port Lambton dock, he headed for Sombra. Two men took the wounded officer into Dr. Cathcart's office.

After the wounds were attended to, the doctor accompanied the two members of the Michigan Immigration staff to the St. Clair Hospital. The wounded man died the next day.

UNITED FARMERS OF ONTARIO

In 1919 the United Farmers Of Ontario organized in Kelly's Hall, Sombra, with 31 members. The first President was R. A. Stokes, Secretary U.S. Cody. Their function was to order seed grain, oyster shell, cement, fencing or binder twine in large quantities and sell to the members.

They started a U.F.O. picnic in June at Vye's Grove on the 10th Concession. It was beautifully shaded by maple trees and had a field for baseball which was the township's favourite sport. People came from miles around, watched the ball games, ate their lunches in the shade of the trees, then gathered to listen to the speeches and concert at night. Bradshaw, Port Lambton, Wyoming, Sombra and Thornyhurst ball teams often played.

1928 William Vye was Chairman. Mr. Ed Armitage, Reeve, was a speaker. In 1931 William McNeil was Secretary.

Programs consisted of skits by Maurice Minnie and Tom Weir, music by The Brunswick Trio of London, Alice Dunbar and bagpipes and Scottish Dances with the Henderson Amusement Company.

There were races in the afternoon. Some winners' names are Muriel Ansell, Rosena Johnston, Ray Abrams, Rosco Gallarneau, Russel McPhail, Jean Ansell and Donald Washburn.

Some names on the ballot sheets were Clifford Davis, Lee e Davis, Morgan Dalgety, Murray Dalgety, Floyd McPhail, Tuffy Davis, Warren Hargrove, Bernard Main, Jeffries, Shaw, Lumley, Arnold, Rankin, Sheppard, Featherstone and Aiken.

CHAPTER FIVE

VILLAGES

BECHER

Becher is situated on the North Branch of the Sydenham River on the Lambton Line. It was named after Henry Becher, who owned considerable land in the County. The second "e" was dropped in the early part of the century.

There was a store, Orange Hall, Methodist Church and Anglican Church. The school was on the West side of the Sydenham on Duff's farm and the children East of the river had to cross the ferry. In 1905, S. S. No. 23 was built on the corner of 16 Sideroad and S. S. No. 13 moved the school to the 10 & 11 S deroad on George Reid's farm.

A hand-powered ferry was in use until 1931 when the bridge was built. Everyone had hoped for a bridge at Becher so finally a delegation from Becher Women's Institute went to County Council and presented their petition. A few years after the bridge was built. Leave it to the women to get things done.

A bridge to replace the first one was opened in 1981 when Dean Hunt was Reeve.

The mail was delivered from Wallaceburg. The two rural routes went out from Becher. Now these routes are all under R. R. No. 5, Wallaceburg.

The Ferry — Becher, Ontario

BRADSHAW

A post office named for William Bradshaw, the first postmaster. There was a store, a sawmill, a church and a school. The school is still standing and is the only one in the township being used as a Community Hall.

DUTHIL

Duthil was named after a parish in Invernessshire, Scotland. An early log school was built in 1840. In 1850 the Grant Estate gave land and a Presbyterian Church was built in 1925. It became a United Church and stood until 1964 when it was sold and torn down. A cairn marks the spot.

Duthil Cemetery is a few rods North of the church grounds.

A general store was across the road but a large tree that stood in the middle of the road was a real landmark. It was cut down in 1951.

Landmark Tree at Duthil

PORT LAMBTON

Fourcas Baby from Detroit was the earliest white settler along the river at Port Lambton but the settlement was one mile below Port Lambton which came to be called Baby's Point. At its best, it attained a population of 150.

Settlement at Port Lambton definitely began in 1824, when Duncan McDonald of Ohio built on Lot F Concession 7. He erected the first frame house in the township. His son, John D., erected a steam mill and became one of the leading businessmen in the Township.

The 1880 record describes Port Lambton as "the liveliest little river town south of Sarnia." It thrived on the lumbering trade because it had two saw mills, a shingle mills, a planing and turning mill, a sash door and blind factory and a grist mill all run by steam. A dock 450 feet long ran in front of the village and there was a Custom House, storehouse and wareh uses. Serving the 450 inhabitants were eight stores, three h tels — The Grand Central, later called the Lambton Exchange and the Morning Star and British Hotel — three liveries, a telegraph office and a school.

There was a daily mail from Sarnia. The Erie & Huron Railway went through in 1858. The Pere Marquette bought the railway in 1902 and sold to Chesapeake and Ohio in 1947. The Ohio Hotel was built in 1907. Frank and Abbie Burgess bought the Washington Hotel in 1943. These hotels are both made into apartments. The Victoria Hotel was torn down in 1961. Ralph Brady built apartments on that spot with stores on the ground floor.

In the 1920's on the river side across from the Victoria Hotel was the Danamere — a dance pavilion used for weekly dances in the summer and sometimes used as a hall for concerts. The White Star Line Dock was just south of the Danamere.

Many are the excursions that went from the White Star Line Dock to Tashmoo Park. Excursion boats were Tashmoo, Wyandotte, City of Toledo and the Greyhound. Mr. William Hannegan was Customs Officer.

White Star Line Dock — Port Lambton — 1924

During the season, a picnic sponsored by Sunday School s, lodges, and bands run one or two excursions a week and twelve hundred people were a normal crowd. It was a full day's pleasure jaunt — 35 miles downstream, six hours of fun at Tashmoo Park and 35 m es back, all for the modest p ice of 50 cents for adu ts and 25 cents for ch ldren. Sunday Schools got spec al rates, enab ling them to take the children for 15 cents and still leave a marg n for prizes for sports.

Around 1950 the Gordon-Fox Products had a manufacturing business making pallets of various types. When the business ceased, the Port Lambton Wood Products made wooden articles such as toys and drawer handles until the building burned in 1954.

Reedy and Cole had a hardware and lumber company from 1914 to 1971.

In 1950 Port Lambton Community Hall was built in memory of soldiers in both World Wars. The Roman Catholic Parish Hall was built in 1954.

Dan McEvoy was named Fire Chief in 1948 when the Fire Protection Committee was reformed in Port Lambton. He held that position until 1969 when he resigned. The township put on a dinner and he was presented with a 25-year plaque from the Fire Area.

Before this, Dan had received a 20-year long-service medal from the Ontario Fire Marshall's office. Tom McEvoy and Gordon Atkins have also received their 30-year long-service medals.

January 1979 — worst ice jam in years.

March, 1976 — worst ice storm causing broken power lines, falling trees, telephone lines. Power off in some locations for days, causing people to be without heat and water.

1978 — heaviest snow storm.

1978 — a replica of Columbus' Santa Maria went up the river.

These excerpts are from the Port Lambton Tweedsmuir History.

PORT LAMBTON 1895

Its Popularity — as a summer resort. Its Probabilities, its Possibilities and its Business Men.

Nestling cosily on the western shore of the wide smooth running river St. Clair some 25 miles south of Sarnia and a few miles north of Lake St. Clair the little village of Port Lambton is found on the map. Unpretentious in appearance, modest yet enterprising in the character of its inhabitants, it is well the Eldorado of the metropolitan citizen, who in the sweltering weather of July and August seeks some sylvan retreat where cool and balmy breezes fan the fevered cheek and rest the business racked brain. All over the country its praises are sounded as a summer resort, and during recent years the people who every summer flock to some resort where there is immunity from dust, smoke, turmoil and bustle of commercial centres, are looking to Port Lambton as the best adapted to fill the requirements of summer boarders and the demand for lots for summer cottages increases each season.

An advantage peculiar to Port Lambton is the fact that it is so situated that the prevailing south west winds of the summer season are tempered in the course over fifteen miles of water before they reach the shore, and the temperature in summer is invariably about twenty degrees cooler than on the opposite side of the river. Another thing which makes the place attractive is the bathing, boating and fishing, the latter especially catering to the delectation of Isaac Walton, who can dangle their legs off the dock and haul in pickerel, bass, perch and other members

of the finny tribe, while enjoying one of Peter Forbes best cigars. As a summer resort Port Lambton stands high and in a few years will undoubtedly be the most popular in southern Canada. Of the early history of the place but a brief outline can be given here, gathered as it were from one or two of the old settlers, chief among whom is Mr. J. P. Merritt, a descendant of good old U. E. Loyalist stock, who recounted to the Herald representative many of the things he remembers of the old days.

Away back in the twenties a surveyor by the name of Rankin, who owned land here, which he obtained by patent from the Crown, made the first survey, but it was not until the forties that other settlers made their appearances, when J. D. McDonald, P. J. Merritt and Angus McDonald came in and took up some land, the McDonald's being first. It was a wilderness then with neither clearings nor roads, and the two or three settlers fished, cleared the land and waited development which came slowly.

In 1850, Philip Donnelly made the survey for the village, laid out 10 acres — 5 acres each from the property of John D. McDonald and John Mora McDonald, — marked it off in lots, the first of which was purchased by Mr. P. J. Merritt and located where Mr. William McDonald's store now stands, shortly after Sydney Cook came from Ohio and purchased a lot. He erected the first frame house in the still sparse settlement. Cook worked on J. D. McDonald's farm, clearing land and cutting up cord wood, and afterwards appointed the first constable of the district.

It was about 1850 that municipal organization was established and a post office was opened at Baby's Point, south of where Port Lambton is situated. Among the first councillors of the township was Mr. Merritt and in 1851 when Municipality was divided into wards he represented Ward No. 1, which included the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth and part of the ninth concessions but the whole ward only numbered 20 votes.

When the Post Office was opened at Baby's Point the name of Lambton was suggested but there being 2 other offices of that name, Baby's Point was given it by the department with William Henderson as postmaster and this continued to be the post office for the district until early in the seventies when an office was opened at Port Lambton although Baby's Point office continued in existence until a few years ago, when the Port began to assume at least some importance in the geography and commerce of the county that was originally intended by those who sanctioned the survey of Lambton Lots, although it was not until the sixties that the faintest hope of the originators began to be realized. About that time a man by the name of Kelly opened a hotel and accommodated a few patrons with lodging and meals and refreshments, but the rent for his rooms and the wear and tear of his chambers then was limited in extent.

The first store was opened by Messrs. Merritt and McDonald, who carried a general stock, such as was adapted to the modest requirements of the yet sparse population, and of the men whom they employed in their timber and wood operation. The next mercantile establishment was opened by James Henderson and he was followed by a man named Briggs, who came from Belleville and opened up a hardware store. Saw mills erected by Mr. Merritt and by Stoddard and Soule, were added to the industries but the timber having been depleted, these were some years ago added to the annals of the past.

In April 1887 the Methodist Church was opened and Rev. Dr. Marks was the first pastor, his membership at the time of the inauguration numbering around twelve. About fifteen years ago the Catholic church was established here and these two places of worship continued to be the only religious edifices in the place.

The flour mills, erected some years ago by Mr. J. D. McDonald, for a while did good business, but its wheels are now hushed in silence, though the somewhat imposing building still stands as a monument to thrift and enterprise.

Many incidents and anecdotes illustrations of early times and the lives of the pioneers might be given did space permit, but as a newspaper sketch only a brief outline can be given. Yet it is sufficient to recall the memories of those who tilled the ground in that unbroken wilderness and by the strength of their arm and [illegible] hewed for themselves a life in the forest where Indians and the wild game had for centuries been in undisputed possession.

It is of the present that the Herald wishes to deal, believing that there lies a future which will make Port Lambton as famous as the renowned Saratoga, Long Branch, Orchard Beach and other hot weather resorts, these facts are related for the good which may come of their dissemination as has already been mentioned, the writer knows of no place so admirably situated as this is for what it is inevitably destined to become — the favorite summer resort of Western Ontario. Brains, capital, enterprise are the three essentials necessary and if brains and enterprise are judiciously used, the other factor will be easily interested. The late Dr. Tye of Chatham was one of the first to realize the advantages of the place, and demonstrated his appreciation in the purchase of property and the erection of a summer residence which he enjoyed most thoroughly. He used to say it was the finest place in Canada for a sanitarium or invalid's home, and it was his ambition to see such an institution established here, but his plans were never sufficiently matured to put into practical operation.

Considerable enterprise is manifested by the present citizens, who are fully alive to the advantages they possess and with keen appreciation of the almighty dollar they are alert, each one in his own business to see that none of the necessary commodities which can be legitimately directed to their coffers, escape. Principle among the firms, who uphold the honor of Port Lambton are the following.

O'Leary and Downs

This firm is composed of Mr. James O'Leary and George Downs and they transact the most extensive business in Port Lambton dealing in timber, cordwood, grain, etc. besides carrying on an extensive farming operations. Both members of the firm may be termed what is now a day known as hustlers in turning the nimble sixpence and making them count into dollars. During the past winter at their camps in Dover and Sombra they took out nearly two million feet of stave timber which finds a ready market at Fairhaven and New Baltimore Mich., and besides this large quantity of railway ties, ship timber and cordwood have been put into marketable shape. The railway ties are supplied to the Grand Trunk, cordwood goes to Detroit and Port Huron and the ship's timber to Marine City. To handle the stuff and run the farms between fifty and sixty men are employed during the winter months and about twenty-five during the summer months to attend to the rafting.

towing, etc. In which the tug "Sawe F and barge Relief" are used, the latter in the transport of cordwood. Last season they handled about sixty thousand bushels of wheat, oats, corn and barley at their two warehouses, situated at the dock and the Erie and Huron Station. Two of one hundred and four hundred acres each are owned in Sombra and another of three hundred in Dawn. These are being cleared up and put under cultivation as fast as the time can be removed with the intention of going extensively into stock raising and as the firm enjoys the reputation of making a success of whatever they undertake, stock farming will undoubtedly be made to pay. In November last the firm suffered a severe loss in the destruction by fire of the Intermediate Hotel but they have faith enough in the advantages and prospects of Port Lambton to rebuild, provided they can find an experienced hotel manager who will take stock in a syndicate and undertake the management of the institution. The village has much to thank Messrs. O'Leary and Downie for and the present popularity of the place is largely due to their extensive business operations and influence. Long may they continue to wield their influencing power over and around us.

SOMBRA

In May 1812 Samuel Burnham and Abraham Smith came from Syracuse, New York and settled along the St. Clair River. The Burnhams took up land from the Jared Burnham farm on the corner of the 6th Concession in the 10th Concession where Mrs. Walter Burnham now lives. Samuel Burnham bought 400 acres at 25 cents an acre. The Smith family took up land from Maurice Minnie and came North. That is how the Smith Line got its name. The first log homes on it by Sam Burnham was on the spot where Harry Barnes' house stands.

They came in May and the amount of work to be done that summer to provide shelter for the family before winter came, kept them all busy, work no early and late. Trees had to be felled and a log house built, besides provide food for the winter months. The woods were filled with all kinds of fruit and there wasn't a blight for everything that grew in those days. There was plenty of honey bees, but all they had to do with, were their own two hands and the ingenuity. To save fruit, they hollowed out a block of hardwood, put the fruit in, covered it with honey and then sealed it with beeswax. maple syrup if you started to can fruit without sugars or sugar.

In the book, "Lambton County's Hundred Years" by Victor Lambton it states that Burnhams and Smiths settled here in 1821 but that even the registry office opened in Sarnia and of course that is the first record the county would have, when people registered their deeds.

Meanwhile many farmers had come in, bought land and and cleared it. Gradually lumber was being demoted from its first place position as an industry and farming was taking over the top spot.

We have May had a blacksmith shop out in front of Allan Hargrove's property. William Hamilton had a wagon shop out over the water just north of the blacksmith shop.

The first school was built around 1820. It had benches for the children to sit on. This was a log building and was destroyed by fire around 1851. A two-room frame building was built the next year in 1852. Jennie Cruikshank of Strathroy came to the village to teach Music and she was prevailed upon to teach in the Junior room until she married William Stewart in 1858.

They were looking for another teacher and they asked Nellie Whitely. She said how could she teach, but Mrs. Mrs. Stover said, "You can read and multiply, can't you?" Miss Whitely was hired and received $6.50 a month. None of these ladies had model school training but taught the children what they had learned at school. In 1866 Miss Eva Green was teacher in the Junior room and the principal was D. D. Mosher who later became Inspector of Public Schools.

In 1854 Sombra was under the St. Clair Mission. At the corner of Moore Town Side and the River Road was the Reynolds Methodist Church. There was a West Lyon Method st Church on the lot where Clifford Shepherd lives. In 1875 a Methodist Church was built on John Street.

In 1883 a Presbyterian Church was built for $1,362.00. This is the building where the United Church people meet now. The first Anglican Church was built on land where Rivers de Cemetery is, but that Church burned, so land was obtained from George Ramsay and his wife Jane. Trinity Anglican Church was built on the corner of John Street about 1871.

Dr. Frank Seager, uncle of Bishop Seage, was warden of the church about 1876, also William Watson and Alexander Meyers.

The history of St. John's R.C. Church was written by Maxine Davin and may be seen in Sombra Museum.

Doctors were Seager, Campbell, McDonald and William Calhoun.

A drug store stood on the corner of King and Water Streets, just north of Kelly and Hughes Store.

George Logan had a tailor shop on the corner of King and St. Clair. When he became a Customs Officer he sold the business and the Sterling Bank moved into the building. A gas explosion on December 25, 1922 razed the building.

In November 1883, the "Valley Record" of Wallaceburg said — Mr. N. Cornwall is opening a Boot and Shoe Shop on Front Street, first door north of Wayhurst's Hotel.

The village had a water pumping system just south of Sicken's Lumber. Our water was never pumped on Sundays or nights.

Water Tower, Sicken Lumber Company — Sombra, 1910

Sombra and a Chamber of Commerce organization. Their most noted activity was building the Community Hall in 1957. William Anderson, school principal, was President at the time and devoted much energy to it, but it was Frank Kellam who spent as much time and labour on it along with many other men of the community.

A Historical Society was formed in November 1957 aiming to open a Museum in the township. They bought the former John Bury house in 1891 that sold and cost $50 and it was 100' by 200'.

After much labour by the men and cleaning and papering by the women, it opened in June 1959. Frank Kellam and Gordon Branton were very active in plastering, cement work, and general renovations. Very active workers in the beginning were Mrs. Eunice Henry, Mrs. Archie Highfield, Mr. and Mrs. Ree Grant, Mrs. Morgan Dalgaty, Mrs Flo Rivard, Mrs Ernest Bradley, Mrs Mary Shoemaker, Mrs. Harold Gurd and Miss Kate Hamilton.

Today it is a great tourist attraction.

On John Street, Wilfred Johnston and hay and coal sheds and a cooperage shed. There were two elevators and stock yards along the railroad track.

There were two Imperial Oil Tanks and Louis Reynolds delivered truck loads of oil with his team of horses to various stores.

There used to be three grocery stores, a restaurant, a drug store, a meat market, a millinery store, a bake shop, 2 hotels, a barber shop, 3 service stations and Floyd McPhail's Garage. In 1994, the is as Pic' N' Pay Variety Store, no barber shop, no service stations and Floyd's Garage was bought by Baker Transit Parts who enlarged the building. There is a large restaurant which is very popular and a large library.

On May 11, 1984 an era ended in Sombra when Warren Hargrove died. His father William Hargrove and bought the General Store from W. C. Curtis in February 1904. In 1916 Charles Dean became a partner and the store was known as Hargrove and Dean. After World War II, Warren came in as a partner. In 1954 Charlie Dean retired and William Hargrove died in 1995.

The community and the church lost a valued member in the passing of Warren Hargrove.

THORNYHURST

Thornyhurst was named after one of the first settlers by the name of Thornbury who built the first frame house which is on the McHall farm. There was already a Thornbury post office so it was named "Thornyhurst". The first post office was in this house. Mr. Thomas Browning became post master and had the office in his house on Lot 8 Concession 9. Mr. Fred Verhdell carried the mail from Wallaceburg by horse and buggy by way of Becher and Duthil, and dropping off mail twice a week at Brownings. The post office closed in 1912, as Thornyhurst then had rural delivery from Sombra.

Thornyhurst school is still standing but has been closed since 1964.

WILKESPORT

In 1865 Wilkesport was the head of navigation on the Sydenham River and was named after the Wilkes Brothers who were lumber dealers. It was a thriving hamlet of three hotels, three general stores, three blacksmith shops, one grist mill, one saw mill, one water power mill, one shoe store, one furniture store, one harness shop, one butcher shop, one jail.

Three steamers, the "Silver Spray" "The Haney" and the "Manitoba" a passenger boat plied the Sydenham. The "Manitoba" made weekly trips to Walkerton.

Four captains, Cook, Cranston, Crane and Kidd settled along the North Branch of the Sydenham.

Sailing boats loaded with white timber averaged from forty to sixty feet in length. Red Oak timber was shipped to the West Indies, to make rum barrels.

Elm was used to make flour barrels. One of the largest elm trees cut along the North Branch measured eight feet across at the butt. Cord wood was shipped to Detroit for fuel.

Boats had to be pulled upstream by oxen and man power. There were several landing grounds where rafts were made. Timber was hauled over a corduroy road, with wooden rails running from Becher to near Florence.

In 1892 logs were jammed to the bottom of the river from Becher to Walkerton, causing severe flooding.

Professor Fred Landon, of Western University spent many summers in Sombra and wrote articles for the London Free Press. This article is entitled "Vanished Portion of Lambton County".

Ontario has many vanished villages and vanished ports as well, but you do not expect to find a vanished port six or seven miles inland from a navigable body of water. That is what makes Wilkesport in Lambton County out of the ordinary. We drove in from the St. Clair River, not quite sure where the village lay and coming to a store, asked how far it was to Wilkesport. "You are in Wilkesport now" was the answer of the storekeeper.

There is not much visible today to recall the once busy lumbering centre where some of the finest lumber in Western Ontario was cut and where activity of something in the way of shipbuilding was attempted. Every sign of the has passed away and the once thickly wooded area is now definitely in need of reforestation.

Black Creek and the Sydenham River join here to produce the stream that moves sluggishly through grain fields toward the St. Clair. Today it will boast nothing more than a good size rowboat but plainly it was a much larger stream 75 years ago.

Tradition says that the first settler in this area was a Paul Sturdevant, an emigrant from New York State. A tombstone records that he was born in 1804 in New York State and that he died at the age of ninety, a hardy big pioneer indeed. But also buried near by are Hiram Sturdevant who died in 1867 aged 52 and his wife Dorcas (Selman) who died in 1864 aged 21.

The original Sturtevant is said to have arrived in 1830 to be followed a year later by one Hamlet Sales. About 1846, John Wilkes came from Brantford and established a mill, thereby making the settlement a place of business. He acquired considerable land and in due time the settlement took his name. But that was a long time ago and there is no stone in the cemetery today recording anyone by the name of Wilkes.

The little cemetery perches on what was the high bank of the river at a time when the stream was many times larger than it is today. There are probably many early burials for which no stone was ever erected. It was not easy in the pioneer era to procure a stone and any temporary marker soon disappeared. This makes it sometimes difficult to identify the first settlers whose names are handed on only in tradition. But from such stones as are to be found much may be learned about the beginnings of a community.

As might be expected in an area contiguous to the St. Clair River there are sailors buried here. Captain James H. Rathdum, 1863 - 1940 was with the Reiss Steamship Line for many years. His last command was the "A. M. Byers" and he also sailed the "John A. King" and the "Charles C. West" of the same fleet. Captain John Stover 1867 - 19[illegible]6 was a well known skipper from these parts. He was with the "Hutchinson" fleet out of Cleveland at various times. It is recalled that he was on Lake Huron on the ninth of November, 1913 when the most violent storm ever recorded broke over that lake sending nine ships and 75 sailors to their deaths, he managed to bring his ship into shelter at Manitoulin Island and thus survived the storm.

The Sydenham was navigable for small craft as far as Wilkesport. Logs were towed on rafts to Wallaceburg and gravel was brought to the north side of the 7th Concession road. When the bridge was built at Becher in 1901 it stopped all navigation north.

There were docks at every concession road and in the winter men cut cord wood and hauled it to these docks and piled it along the road. In the summer it was put on the docks and sold to woodburning steamers and a sailor who was present [illegible].

As the township was cleared and the steamers used other means of fuel supply, the docks gradually disappeared.

Sugar beets were hauled down the Sydenham to the sugar factory in Wallaceburg.

When Imperial Oil was sending men from Canada to work in their oil fields in South America, Eldon Fournie of Wilkesport went as a pipe fitter and plumber. He sailed from New York on Christmas Eve 1920, went through the Panama Canal to Peru where he worked for three years and four months. He learned to speak Spanish. After Peru, he was in Colombia for one year.

In 19[illegible] George Tyre joined the gold rush and went to the Klondike for seven years. After not finding gold he came back to Vancouver then went to San Francisco and worked as a carpenter rebuilding San Francisco, after the earthquake.

Wilkesport, Ontario

WILKESPORT COMMUNITY CENTRES

On October 30, 1963, several people from the W kesport community pledged an average of $10.00 each to purchase the o d W lkesport School. By April 10 1964, the deed was approved and the Wilkesport Community Centre Club was formed with Trustees Cyril Sa lebury, Harry Burgess, Gera d Shepherd and Roy Sheffer in charge. The secretary-treasurer was Elaine Sal sbury.

The hal was used ma nly for euchre parties, Church functions, banquets, Hallowe en parties and the odd w nge. Revenue was rece ved through the euchre parties and rents a which were $7.00 a night or for a Church lunch on or $10.00 a day. Some m nor renovat ons were done to create a stage and kitchen. The first W lkesport picnic and parties began in Ju y 1972 with local people donat ng food for the meal.

The loca people dec ded that in order to benefit from government grants, they should turn the hall ove to Sombra Township so on June 18, 1973, Council moved that they accept the deed of the W lkesport Community Hal and that a bylaw be prepared to make this hall into a Community Centre under the Community Centres Act and a Board of Directors be appointed to assume the responsib lity of management and control of the centre. The deed was registered in the Townsh p's name on July 11, 1973. The f rst board was George Douglas (Chairman), A ex Lecky, Bruce Jackson, Lorne Johnston (Council) and Dean Hunt (Council) with Ann Douglas (Secretary-treasurer).

Various events carried on with the sanction of funerals, showers, elections and teen dances. A small hall diamond was built and the Board made plans to renovate and enlarge the hall. However at the annual meeting in March, 1976 they decided there wasn't enough local support for the renovations. In July 1975, the first pig roast was added to the picnic.

On January 9, 1975, the Board, with the support of the people decided to look into buying more land and putting up a new hall. Several fund raising events were held, such as six dances at Courtright Hall, street dances, canoe races as an addition to the picnic and a 50/50 draw. In March, 1976, the Board started proceedings to buy 12 acres of property from Gerald Shepherd. A severance was applied for and approved and a fence built around the severed portion. The deed was officially transferred in Sombra Township on November 30, 1976.

In February 1977 Council asked the Board to look into a 300 people capacity hall, rather than the proposed expansion, but at the annual meeting on March 10, 1977 the people voted to go for the 600 people capacity hall. The Board committee of Pan Graham(Chairman) George Douglas, Alex Lesky, Jim Onify, Bill Castaldi, Dean Hunt(Council) with Margaret Dawson(Treasurer) and Helen Pretty (Secretary) spearheaded the building of the new hall.

Fund raising efforts continued through 1977 and 1978 with raffles of quilts, beef carpaul n, rifle, Christmas Teddy Bear leather purse, sink-the-ball, 50/50 draws, mission-for-a-day draw auction sale, skate-a-thon, demolition derbys, tractor pulls, Courtright dances, street dances, CHOK hockey ball games, student's Good Friday car wash, snowmobile races, horse ride-a-thon and a beer-tent canvas. Labour machinery, materials and money were donated by hundreds of people and companies in and out of the Township.

Landscaping, tiling, parking lot and three hall additions were finished in these years. Brownies, Guides, Pathfinders, Cubs and Scouts started.

In July 1977 a 25% grant for the land purchase was received from the Ministry of Culture and Recreation. After checking out several tenders, the Board recommended to Council that Tristruction be given the contract for the new hall at a cost of $205,000. In August, 1978, Tristructure declared bankruptcy and Warnock Building Systems were given conditional approval to build the hall on September 11, 1978. The sod-turning took place in October, 1978, and the hall was officially opened on March 10, 1979 with 600 people attending.

In 1980 the old hall and property were sold to Terry McLaughlin.

A Light Fund Committee, under Dick and Pat Swain, was started in May, 1983.

In 1984, the debenture was paid off.

A HISTORY OF SOMBRA TOWNSHIP

by Maude Dalgety
1984

FOREWORD

This book was written to record Sombra Township's History up to the Bicentennial year 1984. This is one of the Bicentennial Projects for Sombra Township. The printing cost was provided by a financial contribution from the Provincial Government. Every chapter has been read by one other person and to the best of our knowledge, is correct. If any valuable information or names have been left out, it has been done inadvertently.

I wish to thank everyone who has helped gather information, with special thanks to Roberta Stewart, Lorna Graham, Gordon Branion and Clarence Moffat.

Maude Dalgety
May 28 1984

SOMBRA TOWNSHIP HISTORY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE — SOMBRA TOWNSHIP 1
Fernes 8

CHAPTER TWO — SOMBRA TOWNSHIP COUNCIL 10
Fire Protection 14
W Darcy McKeough Floodway 15

CHAPTER THREE — INDUSTRIES 22
Former Industries 22
Present Industries 26

CHAPTER FOUR — COMMUNITY LIFE 27
Selman Grange 29
Sombra Township Agricultural Society 30
Women's Institutes 31
Lodges 32
Rum-Running 32
United Farmers Of Ontario 33

CHAPTER FIVE — VILLAGES 34
Becher 34
Bradshaw 35
Duthil 35
Port Lambton 35
Sombra 40
Thornyhurst 42
Wilkesport 43

CHAPTER ONE

SOMBRA TOWNSHIP

HISTORY OF SOMBRA TOWNSHIP

Sombre Townshp occupies the soulhwesterly coruer of Lambton Couuty aud was the lirsl block of land lhal lhe Crown acquired lu Lambton County Sir Peregrine Maitlaurl, lhe Leutenant-governor of Upper Canada 1818 – 1828 a veleran ol lhe Peulnsuler Wer lu Spain, named the heavily wooded township "Sombra" which ra lhe Spaneh wordlor shade. The surveyors found it so deuoely wooded, il shut oul lhe light of day

From lhe Leud Surveyor's ollice in Queen s Park, Toroulo — The Township of Sombra called "Shawnese Township .n lhe Western Dlslrict" was surveyed m 1820 by Depuly Surveyor T Smith, who wrote "There are aboul lhree days work yel to do in lhis lownship — Tha men were wom oul by sickuess and tel gua and had lo qurt. Mr Ball, one ol lhe assistaul surveyors, lies daugerously Ill Perhaps lhera never was a more paiulul survey el lhe breeking up of the wiuler and lhe flel couulry berug covered wrth ice and waler lhree-fourths of the year In lhis lownshp, only lhe borders along lhe river for one concession deep are habitable When lhese are settled lhe rear side remains lor the improvement of lime "

Sombre Village was surveyed in 1854 by Henry Winters.

In Sombre Museum is lhe plan of a village called Lewisville with lhe same slreet uames and plau ol Sombra Village Il was named lor Lewis Burnham who had a store on lhe corner of Smith aud Waler Street. He also had lhe first wiudmill m Sombra.

The weslerly boundary of lhe lowushp is lhe St. Clair River The firsl white men to go up lhra river was LaSalle lhe explorer lu 1679 He was becalmed for a day ou St Clair's Day near lhe head of lhe river and named lhis beaulilul blue body of waler St. Clair in honour of lhe saint.

The river made lhrs township easily accessible lo pioueers and encouraged early settlement. Il was lhe scene of lhe lirsl whrte settlement lu lhe Couuty by French settlers from Detroit, lollowed by Loyalists from lhe States, Scots ou lhe Selkirk Settlement el Baldoon aud later numbers came from lhe Britlish Isles.

Originally Sombra Township wes united with Kenl Couuty lor municipal purposes and its southern boundery was lhe south lim l of lhe preseul Gore of Chalhem. In 1826 despite lhe sparse populetiou Sombre separated from Keul and wes unlted lo St. Clair (uow Moore) Township with Walpole Island added lor good measure A number ol white men had estabtrshed lhemselves as squatters on Walpole Islaud. The lreaty of 1827 set lhal aree aside as an Indiau Reserve so these whites were expelled and settled ou lhe mainland.

lu 1842 all lhe settlers elected Duncan MacDonald lo represent lhem el the Western Dislrict Couucil at Bothwell, which wes lhe centre of our Electoral District.

MacDonald petitioned lhat Council in May 1842 "lor a road from Chatham to Wellaceburg and lhence lo lhe River St. Cla r and along said river lo the Towushlp of Moore" A map of 1847 showing a road paralel lo lhe river along all west Lambton, proves lhat hie petition was granted

To have a road was one thing but to keep it up was another. Maintenance was by statute labour which was work on roads in lieu of taxes, for which they were paid 1 8 shillings a day. Men who looked after the roads were called pathmasters. Lack of sufficient gravel, heavy wet soil and frost damage made dreadful roads. For instance, sometimes the surface was so bad during the spring and fall that the priest from Port Lambton between 1912 and 1926 had to cross the river to Robert's Landing, drive to Mooretown City and cross at Sombra to conduct Mass in St. John's Church there. In 1934 the road was readied for paving and moved back in places, notably through Sombra Village and south of Port Lambton and largely paved in 1935 and completed in 1942.

The earliest settlers depended more on rivers than the roads for transportation. The Sydenham, named for Lord Sydenham, governor of British North America, 1838-1841, cuts across all Sombra's concession lines. Between 1882 and 1903 five toll ferries were put into operation across it. After a bridge was built at Becher in 1931, two ferries ceased to run. Two more stopped after Duthil bridge was built in 1950 and another in 1955. The last ferry — a hand-operated scow — ran to connect the east and west sections of the eleventh concession road until 1977 when Ernest Smith, the ferryman, retired. This road now has a large bridge built by the St. Clair Conservation Authority. Wilkesport bridge on 1 8 Sideroad was built in 1857.

Both the Sydenham and the St. Clair helped the settlers to dispose of their timber. On the St. Clair it was sold to steamers in the form of cordwood, while the output of elm and basswood along the Sydenham was floated to cooperages in Wallaceburg.

Although the cleared land proved heavy and hard to drain, except along Clay Creek and the Sydenham River, Sombra's leading industry has been agriculture followed by tourism and more recently by the production of fertilizers and chemicals. Modern machinery and more particularly extensive drainage allows 60 percent of the township to be devoted to cropland for the raising of soya beans, wheat, corn, barley, small fruits and vegetables. Considerable acreage has been affected by the building of the McKeough Dam to prevent flooding at Wallaceburg. In 1954 they closed the dam saving Wallaceburg from flooding, but Wilkesport suffered from high water.

Farming was the leading industry in 1890 when the township attained a population of around 4,000. That was more than double what it had been in 1881 and more than four times that of 1850. From 1890 on, the population declined to reach 2,851 in 1941. Since then it has increased and is now the largest it has ever been. In 1983 it was 4,274.

All Sombra Township was without a post office until one opened in Sombra Village in 1851 with Peter Cattanach the first postmaster. Shortly afterward William Henderson was the first postmaster at Baby's Point. When the post office opened at Wilkesport in 1852 the mail came in once a week on horseback from Louisville in Kent County.

Among the post offices named to honour Sombra Township people in addition to Wilkesport, for Charles Wilkes, and Baby's Point were: Becher, 1871-1970; Thornyhurst, 1874-1914 and Henry's Corners, 1900-1914. Duthil, 1906-1914 and Avonroy, 1882-1912 were named for places in Scotland; and Charlemont,

1892 - 1912 for a place in Ireland. Pardee 1910 - 1912 was named for F. F. Pardee a federal member for West Lambton from 1905 to 1921. Bickford 1888 - 1959 was named for an official of the Erie and Huron Railway. Another office named Terminus was open from 1892 to 1913. A local teacher named the Busyville office which opened in 1871. Sombra Village, Port Lambton and Wilkesport are the only ones still open in 1984.

Though it didn't have the first post office in the township, Baby's Point in the south-west corner was the earliest settlement. It was named for the Francois Baby family who came there about 1815. The French community which evolved built a church, Sacre Coeur, about 1827. It was the first Catholic Church in the county. A log building with masonry ends, it served the Roman Catholics of the township until they built St. John's Church in Sombra Village in 1870. The French Church was moved to Port Lambton and became a blacksmith shop.

By the 1870's the Catholic population had increased considerably. A new church was needed to accommodate the population as the "Little French Church" at Baby's Point was small and in need of repairs. A new larger church was needed with perhaps a resident pastor to lighten the work load of the priest from Corunna. It was decided to build a new church in Port Lambton as the people were beginning to settle north of the point. A plot of land was donated by Mr. John D. McDonald and his wife in June, 1877. The men of the parish cut trees to be sawed into lumber. Much of the work was voluntary. This church was built on the corners of John and Merrill Streets in 1880. The frame was of large square timbers on a large brick building. This church stood until 1965 when a modern new church was opened on the site of the old one.

A directory for 1869 notes that Baby's Point has: "stages to Walleceburg and Chatham, steamers to Sarnia and Detroit. Concession 6 is named the Point Line from the name Baby's Point, population 150. M. B. Cain, proprietor of the British Hotel. James Menton, the postmaster and Rev. Father Kilroy, clergymen."

Father Kilroy was the priest of St. Michael's in Sarnia at this time but served a number of points throughout the county as well.

A memento of Baby's Point, the key to the Église de Sacré Coeur, is now in the museum in Moorelown. Little else save the name of the old community survives. In Sombra Museum is a letter dated 1881 asking permission to have a priest come from the United States to minister to the parish.

The telegraph line went through in 1870. Lambton Telephone Company sold shares and in 1910 the South Lambton Company was granted a franchise to erect lines back in the township. The first switchboard went into Shepherdson's Hardware Store in May 1899. Celia Shepherdson was the operator. Then it moved to Hargrove's Store. William Hargrove was operator when the store was open and from two to four on Sunday. Later it was located in a small office in a house across from Hargrove's which has been torn down to make room for expansion of Baker Transit Parts. Among the operators were the Keyser sisters, the Bowles sisters, Sadie Dell, Merian McRitchie, Grace Huey, Irene Broad and Jean Henry. Many local men were linemen. Among them were: Ed Thomas, Ed Reedy, Tom Forbes and Herold Workman.

Rey Hedegard was the last lineman when Bell took over about 1960. The original switchboard is in Sombra Museum. The system went on dial October 2 1957.

Hydro was turned on in Sombra Village in 1924. It came later to the back of the township.

Old Highway 40 was opened in September 1936. New 40 went through in 1977 at a cost of 18.4 million dollars for 23.9 miles.

The Parkway Commission was set up in 1956. Four parks in Sombra Township are well patronized. Calhoart Park, at the mouth of Clay Creek, was named for Hon. Bryan Calhoart, a member of the Legislative Assembly.

Land was donated on the west side of the highway by Henry Cundick in 1957 to make a park. It has a beautiful bathing beach and tables. Gordon Branton, an ex-warden, worked with other ex-wardens to get the property east of the highway for the Lambton Cundick Park. It has a large trailer park at the back and picnic tables at the front and is very popular.

Reagan Park, south of Sombra, was named for Dan Reagan, a township road maintenance man.

Brander Park, south of Port Lambton, was named for a very fine druggist of Wallaceburg. He started the Rose Trail along Highway 40.

In 1903, Sombra became a police village and remained so for 70 years. By 1973, the village tax base was not large enough to provide the street and shore maintenance that was needed. It voted to rejoin the township, where industrial taxes allow for better service.

In 1855 the Huron & Erie laid the rails from Sarnia to Chatham, and in March, 1856 the first passenger train went through. Mr. George W. Smith was the first station agent in Sombra village and the first ticket stubs are in Sombra Museum. A man paid 55 cents for a ticket from Sombra to Tupperville, in March 1859. The Pere Marquette was the next owner. Chesapeake & Ohio owns the railway today. The last passenger train was in April 1934.

Natural gas came into the township in 1917. Mr. Alex McRitchie had an implement shed next to Hargrove's Store. He and Mr. William Aneell set up a depot for the installation and repair of gas services for the homes here.

Along the walls, they drove in pieces of pipe to hold longer lengths of pipe of various diameters and they had elbows, nipples and valves in bins arranged in order over the floor space. They themselves did not actually install or hook up the services; but they entered into contract with the prospective customers and Mr. William Henry, who acted in a way as a ferret, went under the different houses to make all the connections leading in from the meters. Many houses had gas lights until hydro came in 1924.

There were four street lamps in Sombra village and Frank Stover got 25 cents a week for lighting them.

On Christmas morning, 1920, Ed Mullins, the janitor at the Sterling Bank in Sombra went into check the building and found the gas out. He lit a match to light the stove down in the basement. The leaking gas ignited and blew him up to the

first floor the building was flattened and windows in all the buildings nearby were broken. Mr Mullins had no injuries, just singed eyebrows and hair

The building pictured below replaced it.

Installation of sewers in Port Lambton and Sombra was started in 1974 and the process of laying sewers on back streets continues to the present time

Sombra and Port Lambton had their own pumping systems with frequent shut-offs and the taste of chlorine prevalent at times.

In 1977 the water line from Lake Huron was laid, so now we have water pleasing to the taste and seldom a shut-off It cost $2.6 million It was constructed by Aztec Contractors and has a capacity of 2 900 gallons per minute.

The township bought water from the pipeline at a cost of 75 cents per 1 000 gallons Each household was charged $225 for hookup.

SCHOOLS

1962 was the last year of the one-room schools. The Province declared larger school areas with bus service.

In Sombra Township, two areas were established the east half and the west half The East Sombra School was opened in 1963 The Trustees elected were Garnet Brenton, Robert McGee, George Davis, Clarence Shaffer and William Crowe; and they appointed Bruce McCallum Secretary-Treasurer

In the west portion the school named Riverview School was opened in 1964 The Trustees were Grant Watson, Gordon Bicum, Jack Beggs, Sam Wesley, Allen Elliot. Clarence Moffat was appointed Secretary-Treasurer

Then the Province made the Township into one school area and the Trustees elected to the Township Area were Grant Watson, Gordon Bicum, Jack Beggs, Garnet Branton and William Crowe and Clarence Moffat was appointed Secretary-Treasurer.

In 1969 the Province declared there would be only County Boards, and all assets were to go to the County and that Sombra Township and Dawn Township together would be allowed one representative to the County Board. Representatives have been Grant Watson, Joanna Highfield, Lorne Smith, Kenneth Baker.

In the first World War, the boys of Sombra Township answered their country's call and enlisted in the 149 Lambton's Own Regiment. Many of them spent months at Camp Borden before going overseas. The men from Sombra Township who served in the first World War were, along with others.

Charlie Bishop
Archie Bishop
Beattie brothers
Pte. Hugh A. Allen
Sgt. Ernie Smith
Sgt. George Smith
William Fox
John Tulloch
Walter R. Browning
Sapper Fred Myers
Major Jim McRae
Cpl. Hugh McRae
Allen Dall
Frank McRae
Norman Broad
Gunner John Luckman
Louis Henry
George Johnson
Clifford Stokes
Harold Slover was in the Air Force
Guy Forbes
Sapper Elmer Shove
Cpl. J. H. Selman
Ivan Young
Lloyd Shephard
Howard Beggs
Wm. McAllister

In the Second World War they enlisted in the Army, Navy and Air Force. Those serving in the Second World War were, along with others:

Jack Hart
Jack Yorke
Joe Card
Warren Hargrove — D.F.C.
William Anderson
Harold McKillican
Frank Doan
Murray Ellis
Donald McKillican
Capt. F. C. McRitchie
Mac Henry
Sam Plain
Joe Gormley
Robert Minnis
Charlie Washburn
Oscar Yorke
Richard Henry
Donald McRitchie
Ken Wellon
Bob McPhail
Russell King
Clifford (Tuffy) Davis
Harry Reedy
Gordon Sterling
Harry Barnes
Ray Hazzard
George Kerr
Sheldon Browning
Robert Buckingham
Gordon Tulloch — Albert
Clarence McKnight
Wilf Dennis
Grant Watson
Alistair Horley
Walter Horley
Andy Poland
Cy Salisbury
Richard E. Brown
Wilbur Linton
Reg Kerr
Kenneth Browning
Charlie Hunter
Leslie Tulloch
Bert Huey
Alfred Henry
Warren Henry

FERRIES
PORT LAMBTON FERRY

Before 1880 Henry M. McDonald of Port Lambton ran the first ferry from Port Lambton to Roberts Landing. He used a row-boat holding four or five passengers, then a sailboat.

George Bradley also rowed passengers over for five cents each way.

John D. McDonald bought the business from Henry McDonald and ran the "Nellie H", a steam ferry.

George Roberts was the next owner. He was the first ferryman at Port Lambton to have a gasoline motor launch. "The Pilot" (it was built in Detroit and it took him two days and a night to bring it up from Detroit. After he sold the business he became Customs Officer at Roberts Landing, which was named for his great-grandfather, a pioneer of Michigan. Notes from George Robert's widow: In May of 1901 people were cutting their lawns, but the ice in the river was so heavy that freighters and a passenger boat "Mary" were stranded in the ice in front of Port Lambton. The crews ran out of food, so some hardy souls made their way to land to replenish the galleys, and Port Lambton grocers and butchers did a heavy business while the ice remained.

Julius Cook of Detroit owned the ferry and his two nephews, George and Charlie Davis of Port Lambton operated "The Jewel" about 1903 - 1908. They docked at the White Star Line dock beside the Densmere Pavilion. Many passenger boats such as the "Tashmoo" and the "Hiawatha" docked here for excursion passengers to Stag Island or Tashmoo Park.

William Bedford of Roberts Landing owned the business in 1914. His two sons, Ray and Roy, operated the "Reliance", a gasoline launch.

He sold to Jim Ansell of Port Lambton who ran the "Owl".

In 1919 Webster Dawson of Port Lambton bought the business and operated the ferry with the help of Herbert Roberts. At this time motor cars were getting more plentiful and Web Dawson had a lowscow built to carry four cars. So Herb Roberts brought the first car over on the scow pulled by the launch "Owl", a one cylinder Gray marine engine.

Earl Dawson assisted his father and they had motor driven scows built — the "Leroy D." and the "Lu".

John Jillson worked on the Dawson Ferry for ten years. In 1958 John and his brother Peter bought the business. They bought the "Ontamich" in 1973. "Ontamich" is a combination of Ontario and Michigan. Later John left the partnership and in 1983 Peter sold the business to Lowell Daigaly of Sombra.

Customs officers were Hugh Deming, Ab Mickle, George Logan, Clifford Nixon, Randle Purser, William Hinnegan, Ivan Young, Scotty Pearson and Roy Clark. Now the Customs and Immigration officers alternate between Walpole Island, Port Lambton and Sombra.

SOMBRA FERRY

Before 1850 Samuel Whitely started the first ferry from Sombra Village across the St. Clair River with a sailboat called the "Silent". When there was no wind, he used a row-boat. He charged ten cents a round trip. In the winter when the ice was not all safe he had a boat with iron runners on the bottom to shove over the ice; then when they came to open water they all got in and rowed across.

After Samuel's death in 1885, his son Tom Whitely took over and used the same boats until he got a small steam ferry called the "Comfort". Captain William Gale ran the ferry for Mr. Whitely also Mose Doan.

The railroad went through in 1885. After that many people crossed on the ferry and then took the train to their destination. Freighters came into dock; also wood-burning vessels used to dock here to load up wood.

William Ball also ran a ferry at the same time from a dock in front of Washburn's Hotel. He started about 1864 and ferried over thirty years. He used a sailboat named the "Monen" but later converted it into a gasoline fueled boat. The launch "Marian" burned at the dock on August 18, 1912 when the gasoline tank exploded. He then had the "R.B." named after his son, Roy Ball. It was also a motor launch. Mr. Ball went out West for three years and sold his business to Earl Johnson of Marine City. When Mr. Ball came back, he bought his business back; but soon he took back and sold his business to Joe Miller of Marine City.

There was great opposition between the two ferries run by Joe Miller and Tom Whitely. The Canadian Customs Office stood on the river bank in front of Wm. Stover's Office and Joe Miller ran his ferry from a dock at the foot of Smith Street. Arguments arose because Tom Whitely was a Canadian and Joe Miller was an American. Things became so bad that one day each ferry was only allowed to go to the middle of the river. The Ferrymen came to terms because the passengers didn't like changing boats in the middle of the river. The ferries were to run on alternate days. Finally Mr. Whitely bought out Joe Miller so there was only one ferry business after that between Sombra and Marine City.

Whitely's first motor boat was a converted yawl named the "Whitely". Mr. Whitely built his first tow-scow about 1912. This carried a team and wagon and later one car. Then he built one to carry two cars.

The cement block Customs house was built in 1919. For many years the life-sized lion on top of the Customs office was a land mark, put there by Tom Whitely who died in 1933.

Custom's House & Dock — Sombra, Ontario

In the 1920 s, the launches were "Miss America No. 1" and the "Cadillac". There were two low scows carrying four cars each. Tom Whitely's son, Delos, assisted his father in the business and a large motor launch was named the "Delos W." Delos Whitely was drowned off in a boat in 1934. The business was then sold to an American Frank Johnston; and he bought a motor-driven scow named "The Wit" to hold six cars. This did away with low-scows.

On August 9 1947 the pilot of a small plane had been making short flights with his plane until around 9 p.m. when he secured the plane at the dock in Marine City Michigan.

The seaplane NC 2309 was a 65-horsepower Aeronca — 7 A. C. S. Al 7 15 The pilot decided to fly his plane to Pearl Beach to moor it for the night. He then examined his mooring line and found same in good condition. He proceeded to turn on the ignition on both magnetos and crack the throttle and then step out on the pontoon and crank the propeller. The motor of the plane failed to respond at first and the operator continued to make alternate adjustments and cranking the propeller until finally at approximately 7 45 the engine suddenly started, and at that particular moment large swells, caused by passing motor boats, were rolling in and caused the seaplane to surge or bounce. This bounce and sudden forward motion of the plane when the engine started put a severe strain on the mooring line and caused said line to part. The forward motion of the plane threw the operator off the pontoon into the river. He tried to hang on to the pontoon but the sharp metal edges cut his hand and prohibited him from holding on.

The plane then taxied out into the river and after making several complete circles in the river headed directly toward the ferryboat "Wit". At approximately 100 yards from the ferryboat, the plane struck some swells which caused it to bounce three or four times, with the next bounce sending it aboard the ferryboat. It struck the apron and came to rest on the after end of the vessel, with the motor still running.

The motor vessel "Wit" had aboard some 30 passengers and crew of two plus one automobile. Said vessel was on a scheduled trip from Sombra, Ontario to Marine City Michigan, at the time of the collision. There were no personal casualties aboard the "Wit".

The "Wit" then completed her crossing and moored at her berth in Menne City where the plane's operator came aboard and shut off the plane's engine. The seaplane was last inspected at the Detroit seaplane base on 29 July 1947 and the pilot had 600 hours successful flying time.

The present dock at Sombra was completed in 1940. The Customs office was built in the next year and in 1941 the officers moved into their new quarters. When the office was moved to the government dock, the old office became a residence and the lion was taken off by Hans Werner who had bought the business from Frank Johnston. Mr. Werner kept the business only a short time and sold it to Morgan Dalgety and George Dean in 1948. The "Wit" was named the "Anel D", and registered in Canada. The "Anel D" was sold and the "Lowell D" was put into service here until the "Delden" was built in 1951. This was built at Eneau and brought up through Lake Erie, Detroit River and Lake St. Clair. This is a large steel ferry carrying twelve cars and one hundred passengers.

A new Customs house was built in 1973. Customs and Immigration Officers were Andrew Mullins, 1879–1884; Asa Cronk, 1884–1890; Henry Roebuck, 1890–1897; Alexander A. Meyers, 1897–1907; John Burnham, 1907–1929; Herold Stover, 1929–1956. Other officers were William Laing, who later moved to Ottawa, Stuart Clerk, who died in 1978; Herold McKillican, who died in 1981; and William Anderson. Now the Customs and Immigration officers alternate between Walpole Island, Port Lambton and Sombra.

Other Customs Officers up to the present time are:

Arthur Moore, *retired*	Thomas Atkins	Bill Sterling
Harry (Jumbo) McFadden *	Douglas Christopher	Bob Grass
Gerald McConnell	Roy Clarke *	Bob Oliver
Harry Reedy	Don Crundwell	Herb Stephenson
Henry Leuzon	Murray Huckle	Nick Frigo
Robert Sterling		

* — DECEASED

April, 1984 was a month like never before. The winter of 1884 was one of the hardest winters felt in these parts with the thermometer hovering near 0°F. in January. On January 21, the radio said it was the coldest day of the century. So much ice was made. February was a lovely mild month and everyone hoped we wouldn't pay up for it in April, but we did.

The North wind blew for days and there were thirty miles of ice in Lake Huron. River St. Clair filled with ice and Sombra ferry didn't run from April 8 to 29. It was one of the worst ice jams in history.

Freighters were stranded in ice from Hersen's Island to Sarnia. Ice breaker "Mackinac" and Coast Guard Cutters had to escort the freighters one by one through the ice. The "Des Groseilleurs" from Montreal came to their assistance. The Coast Guard decreed one way traffic each day. On Easter Sunday there were sixty ships waiting in the Detroit River to come North, twenty in Lake Huron to go South and ten at various places in the St. Clair. The cost to shipping companies was in the millions.

CHAPTER TWO
THE TOWNSHIP COUNCIL

The first official record of municipal organization was in the year 1822. Sombra Township and Dover Township were united, and there was listed in that territory 8 frame houses, 1 stone house, 103 horses, 154 oxen, 223 cattle. The assessors for that year were Dennis Drouillard and John Hamilton. The tax collector was Robert Crow.

The council at first met at homes in years 1851 and 1852 at Robert Mowbray's, River St. Clair; 1853, Wm. Henderson's, Baby's Point; 1854, James P. McDonald, Baby's Point; 1855, to 1857, Alexander P. McDonald's, Baby's Point; 1858 and 1859, John Kerby's, Sombra.

From then on the council met as follows: 1860, Good Templar's Hall, Sombra; 1861 and 1862, Sombra House; 1863 to 1867, Good Templar's Hall, Sombra. There were two meetings held in Wilkesport in 1867 on May 11th and November 4th.

In the year 1867 a town hall was built in Sombra Village. The first meeting was held in it December 30 1867 and met regularly there until 1885. In the year 1866 about one half of the meetings were held in the town hall and one half in the Central Hotel, Wilkesport.

From 1866 the meetings became fewer in Sombra Village until in 1882 the regular meetings were held in Wilkesport until 1967 when the Municipal Building was built south of Sombra Village. Meetings in Wilkesport have been held at:

1882	– Hayes Hall	1911 to 1914	– Regan's Hall
1883 and 1884	– Jenning's Hall	1915 to 1917	– Lorengen's Hall
1885 to 1886	– Shaw's Hall	1918 to 1921	– Hamilton's Hall
1898 to 1901	– Richmond's Hall	1921 to May 1950	– Women's Inst. Hall
1902 to 1906	– Hamilton's Hall		
1906 to 1910	– Mason's Hall		

In the year 1950 an extension was built on the Clerk's office at Wilkesport and the council met there from May 1950 until 1967. The town hall at Sombra was sold to George M. Shepherdson, in the year 1897. The clerk's office was built at Wilkesport in the year 1916. The clerk's office is now the Library in Wilkesport, opened in November 1981.

Here is an excerpt from December 1852 minutes. "Moved by Mr. Kimball, seconded by Mr. Merritt that the assessors of each ward be paid the sum of ten shillings." (Note the spelling when double "s" was used in a word.) British currency was used until 1857. The school grant for the township in 1852 was £14. 12. 1-1/2.

In 1854 Council met at the home of James F. McDonald, Baby's Point. Another excerpt from the minutes: "Inspectors of Houses of Public Entertainment — A. W. Watson, 1st Ward; Duncan M. McDonald 2nd Ward; Lional Stewart, 3rd Ward; Hiram Little 4th Ward; David Greyson 5th Ward." Estimate of current expenses of the Township of Sombra in 1854 was £81. 16. 2 1/2. One pound, five shillings was paid to James McDonald for the use of a Council room in his house for one year.

In 1860 Council moved to pay eight dollars a month to a destitute person when he needed it. The names of Samuel Whitely, Andrew Mullins and Jacob Dingman appeared in the minutes. Petitions "praying" the Council to open roads were granted by a by-law. Two thousand dollars was at the disposal of Council for improvement of roads and bridges in the township. (Note the difference in 1984.) There were 366 names on the assessment roll of whom

"5 are twice placed there

11 are women

12 whose votes are not good

2 are aliens

1 under age

1 dead

4 who have left the province"

Needless to say, the voter's list was corrected. The treasurer's salary was $50, clerk's $100. Assessor $50, tax collector $100 and auditor $6 per year.

In July 1860 $42 was apportioned for planking a part of the River Road in front of the south half of Concession 11

We call the east and west roads concessions, but the concessions are really pieces of land conceded to the land owners and the roads take their number from the concession north of them. Thus this piece of road being planked, would be Sombra Village South.

In 1858 a petition was sent to the Attorney General with regard to widening the road along the St. Clair River after it had caved in and been lost.

In 1859 a by-law was passed for the regulation of Taverns, Houses of Public Entertainment and stores selling liquors. The Council procured $1 000 to distribute seed grain to farmers of the township who were in need of assistance. The December 1859 meeting dealt with setting the size of S. S. No. 12 and No. 10 also exempting the parsonage in Sombra from taxes. Rev. M. Morden was the minister.

The population was 1 485 and there were but four taverns in the township so Samuel Whitely was granted one for the Sombra House.

In March 1861 Tavern licenses were granted to John Kelly and John Highland. Council received a petition from farmers on Concession 11 saying their lands were covered with water because ditches on Concession 11 and 12 were dug wrong.

On June 24, 1867 there was a motion by Andrew Smith that $50 be paid to M. L. Burnham for plank for sidewalks in Sombra Village. In September 1867 tenders were opened for building a Town Hall in Sombra, there being three tenders as follows: William Knight, $1 792; A. A. Meyers, $1 800 and Aaron Kirby $1 350. Mr. Kirby's was accepted. Two town lots had been bought from John Hinnegan for $130 and Henry Winters had been paid $25 for drawing the plan and specifications for the hall. Mr. Forsyth, township clerk and Jason Holl were named a Commission to be Inspectors. The first Council meeting in the new hall was December 1867.

In 1869 Tavern licenses were issued to Sam Whitely, James and Wm. Morden. Messrs. Cain and McEvoy. Jos. Adare and Angus, and John Kelly. Shop licenses were issued to Daniel Dawson and James Henderson. County assessment was $1 258.72.

In 1870 James McNulty was granted a tavern license in Port Lambton.

The Council furnished posts and the first telegraph line was built from Wallaceburg to Port Lambton and Sombra in the year 1870.

The Reeves of Sombra Township were:

1850 Lionel Johnston
1851 William Kimball
1852 A.P. Toulmin
1856 Daniel Meyers
1857 William Kimball
1857 Robert Mowbray
1858 James Dewson
1861 A. P. Toulmin
1862 William Kimball
1863 A. P. Toulmin
1866 James Dewson
1872 Peter Caltanach
1873 William Kimball
1874 J. S. Burnham
1875 Andrew Smith
1876 William Kimball
1878 Henry Winters
1879 William Kimball
1880 J. D. McDonald
1888 J. W. Snider
1889 Peter Grant
1897 Neil Grant
1901 James Bowles
1905 Thomas Boothmen
1909 Neil McGugen
1912 Neil Grant
1918 John Huey

1920 Alfred Selman	1942 Clarence Moffat	1970 James Moran
1922 Victor Green	1947 Harry Sheller	1974 Lome Johnston
1924 Edward Armitage	1950 Gordon Branton	1977 Dean Hunt
1927 James Huey	1957 Shephard McCallum	1990 Joseph Dedecker
1936 Samuel Carrothers	1964 Gordon Branton	

Sombre Township Reeves who have held the Office of Warden of Lambton County are

A. P. Teulmin	John Huey	Gordon Branton
James Dawson	James Huey	James Moran
Peter Grant	Shephard McCallum	

John Huey was Clerk of the County from 1920 to 1950

For Sombra Township's Centennial effort, the beautiful large Municipal Office was built south of Sombra Village in 1947 when Gordon Branton was Reeve.

Clerks of the Township have been:

1964 W. Peterson	1879 Arthur Henderson	1922 Edgar Henry
1864 Peter Cattanach Jr.	1885 Orra Bishop	1929 Roy E. Bradshaw
1866 Andrew Muttine	1903 William McGhee	1972 Maurice Burke
1974 John D. McDonald	1913 William A. Soml	1983 John DeMars

The longest standing Clerk of the Township was Roy Bradshaw. Mr. Bradshaw began his long association with Sombra Township when he assumed the Treasurer's position in 1925. He moved up to the post of Clerk a year later.

Author of a book on the municipal history of the township, Mr. Bradshaw was well-acquainted with the municipality's history and procedure. He knew the township well and had a vast amount of information at his fingertips.

In September, 1969, Township Council honoured Mr. Bradshaw with an 80th birthday celebration at the Port Lambton Parish Hall.

Mr. Bradshaw retired in January, 1972 and he died on May 24th, of the same year.

Sombra clay has been the butt of much ridicule and was the concern of the Council for many years.

Prior to 1931, the roads in the township were all clay except the roads which had been designated County roads and had gravel. In the early 20's the Kimball Sideroad was paved as far North as Lambton Line. Having lived on the Lambton Line, half a mile from the Kimball sideroad, I remember one Spring the mud on the Lambton Line was hub-deep and that pavement was so near, so my brother hitched the team to the car, pulled us through the mud, tied the team in S. S. No. 26 school yard and we went to Wallaceburg by car to do our shopping.

Prior to this, ditches constructed on the side of the road served two purposes: to drain the adjoining land and also to build up the road.

When automobiles became more numerous and they could only be used in dry weather (they were jacked up in the garage during the winter), people began to think that better roads should be supplied. When the Government collected license fees for autos they returned a portion of the money to the township in the way of a grant for road maintenance.

In 1934 Sam Carrothers, while aspiring to the Reeveship, presented the people with a program whereby he would put gravel to everyone's property and it would not cost over five mills, by using the subsidies from the Ontario Government. The people in the township accepted his proposal and for six years the Reeve and Council were returned by acclamation. That was the foundation on which later councils have continued to build and improve township roads.

In 1942 Sam Carrothers was appointed Road Superintendent and continued in that capacity until 1965. Other Road Superintendents were:

Clifford (Tuffy) Davis	Ronald Johnson
Oliver Dawson	Sam Dunsmith

Another resident who has served the township well is Clarence Moffat. In 1919 he became Secretary-Treasurer of Carlisle School and remained so until he became the Township's Central School Board Secretary. It became a County School Board in 1969 and Clarence was retired. He was on the Sombra Township Council for fifteen years, serving five years as Reeve. He belonged to the Firemen's Association and received a plaque from them after serving them for thirty years.

FIRE PROTECTION

In 1948 ratepayers in the Southwest part of the township asked the Township Council to form a Fire Area bounded on the north by the centre of the 10th Concession, in the east by the County Line and the west by the St. Clair River. The first committee appointed to manage this Fire Area was: Percy Johnston, William McNall, Howard Myers, Glen Payne. The committee arranged with the trustees of Port Lambton Village to operate and man the fire equipment and Dan McEvoy was named Fire Chief in 1948, a position he continued to hold until 1983.

The remainder of the township was designated as Fire Area No. 2. Fire protection was arranged for Area 2 by buying the services from surrounding Fire Areas such as Fire Area 1, Moore Township Fire Department and Tupperville Fire Department until 1968 when Fire Area 2 decided to provide their own protection and built a Fire Hall at Wilkesport and bought a pumper fire truck.

In 1975 further protection was provided by building a Fire Hall at Becher and the purchase of another pumper truck.

In 1981 an addition was built to the Wilkesport Hall. Now in 1984 the township has three Fire Halls with four pumper trucks, two emergency vans and eighty volunteer firemen.

Fire Chiefs in Area 1 have been	Dan McEvoy 1948 – 1983
	David Moran, 1983 –
In Area 2	Jack Swain
	Harold Romph
	Wilbur Shegley
	Owen Watson, now for 12 yrs.

When Area No. 2 went for their own protection the committee was:

Carl Jackson
William Huey
Bert Peters
Clarence Moffat

Sombra Township Council in the Bicentennial year is:

Reeve	Joseph Dedecker
Deputy Reeve:	William DeMars
Councillors.	Lorne Graham
	Steven Miller
	Romaine Vendevenne
Clerk	John DeMars
Treasurer	Joan Watson
Engineer	Larry Burnham

W. DARCY McKEOUGH FLOODWAY

Probably the longest, most controversial issue ever to affect Sombra Township was this project, originally called the Wilkesport Dam and Diversion Project. Although the general public first learned of it through a special four-page insert in the newly formed Wallaceburg Courier Press in December 1972 the Sydenham Valley Conservation Authority's Project No. 66 as it was called, was well on its way on paper.

A preliminary engineer's report had already been completed by August 5th 1971 after a request to the Authority from Wallaceburg on April 1st 1970 to undertake a feasibility study to construct a dam and diversion south of Wilkesport on the North Sydenham River. The Authority approved the undertaking of the study on April 14 and received a $29 000 Provincial grant June 10th, 1970 for the said study.

This Dillon Report described a flood control project involving a dam 29' feet above normal water level at Duthil a 900 acre reservoir and a five mile diversion channel travelling from just north of the dam west along the midpoint of the Tenth Concession to the St. Clair River. The report suggested two alternatives for the channel: navigable and non navigable. The first choice preferred by the Dillon engineers involved a wet channel as an extension to the reservoir at an estimated cost of $6.4 million. The second had a dry channel except during floods at an estimated cost of $5.5 million, excluding land acquisition and final engineering.

On August 31st, 1972 the Authority adopted alternative No. 1 as Project No. 66 conditional that the non-grant portion, (45%) of the project was cost-shared by the benefitting municipalities. Wallaceburg (80%) Chatham Township (10%) and Sombra Township (10%). On October 13th 1972 the Authority submitted a brief requesting the Minister of Natural Resources' approved of the now $6 million project. This proposal involved the acquisition of 450 acres of land for the diversion channel plus 1 800 acres for the "lake" and five feet of free board (595' level). The rest up to 597' (Hurricane Hazel level at the dam) would have a flood easement bought. The purposes outlined were flood control, recreation, stream flow augmentation and pollution abatement. Sombra Township's share was to be $27 500 over three years. However, on December 22nd, 1972, no approval was given by the Minister as "funds are not available at this time".

This was the time that the previously mentioned Authority-sponsored Courier Press insert arrived in the homes of Wallaceburg and Sombra Township residents. It described the project as the best solution for eliminating flooding in Wallaceburg with added recreational features like sandy beaches, blue water and sailing boats. The last point alone was enough to plant the seed of suspicion in those who knew the clay-bottomed, silty Sydenham, so they attempted to get information including

the Dillon Report from the Authority Lorne Henderson M P P and Sombra Township council After obtaining either little or no information from each source and being told extra copies of the Dillon Report were not available, a group of Sombra ratepayers called S.O.S. (Save Our Sydenham) was formed with President, Walter Scott Vice-president, Paul Graham and Secretary Robert Sauvé with the hope that the group would be more effective

Meanwhile, on March 5th 1973, the Authority appointed a special Steering Committee whose purpose was to further Phase II (Land Assembly 1973–75) and Phase III (Final Engineering and Construction 1976–78) of the project. They pressed on obtaining approvals from Wallaceburg and Chatham Township Councils, support from Lorne Henderson, Lambton M.P.P. and Darcy McKeough, Kent M.P.P. and conditional acceptance from the Ministers of Natural Resources and Environment — one condition being that the Authority must meet with Sombra Township. Aerial mapping and photography began in May, 1973 after a $2,600 Provincial grant was approved

The S.O.S. group requested a meeting with the Authority before it was any further committed to the project, but were told there would be no meeting until the mapping study was completed. S.O.S. now tell that due to the character of the river, the reservoir would take thousands of acres of prime bottomland out of production to be replaced by cattails and stagnant water and had to convince the Authority to drop the lake idea and preferably the whole dam project. On July 16th 1973 they presented their Council with a 1,049 name petition of Sombra landowners opposing the dam because of loss of bottomland, disruption of drains, tax increases and debris entering the St. Clair River. The Authority finally agreed to hold a meeting on July 23rd 1973 with the S.O.S. executive who presented them with a copy of the petition opposing Project No. 65 and with an alternate flood control plan for Wallaceburg included smaller dams at each bridge, removal of the Center Bridge in Wallaceburg and dredging of Running Creek and the mouth of the Snye. The proposal was immediately rejected as being too costly and ineffective. The Authority was very upset with the S.O.S. for not waiting until completion of the study

On July 27th, 1973 word came down from Toronto "The project is postponed indefinitely." The S.V.C.A. still continued on with the study and then tried to meet with Sombra Township Council, who refused as long as the project was postponed. S.O.S. also continued their battle with lobby letters to government officials and non-Wallaceburg media coverage to get support to stop the project forever — not just indefinitely. The S.V.C.A. used the Wallaceburg media to defend their position. The lines were drawn. The bitterness had begun.

S.V.C.A. finally arranged a closed meeting with Sombra Township Council and an open meeting afterwards on December 17th 1973 at East Sombra Central School. The Dillon engineer was there to explain the project to a gym full of Sombra people, some S.V.C.A. and M.N.R. officials and a few biologists, naturalists and an invertebrate zoologist from Toronto, Sarnia and Ottawa, respectively, who were concerned about the water quality and depth of the reservoir. However, the engineer announced that the Authority had dropped the lake idea and opted for the dry diversion channel.

The Authority again wrote up another brief for M.N.R. approval in January 1974. This one included only the dam and dry diversion channel and changed the

land acquation to 450 acres for the channel and 100 acres for the dam site and flood easements only above the dam north to the Avonroy Road to the 597' elevation — still at a total cost of $9 million. Wallaceburg and Chatham Township requested the S.V.C.A. to proceed with Phase II. On February 9th, 1974 Sombra Council led by James Moran met with the landowners directly effected by the project and decided to strongly oppose the project. S.O.S. tried to convince the S.V.C.A. members by letter that the project was too costly both monetarily and socially that the engineering data was incorrect and that Wallaceburg would still flood.

At the S.V.C.A. Annual Meeting on February 21st, 1974, the Authority members voted 16 to 9 against proceeding with Phase II. Wallaceburg now threatened to drop the Authority.

The Sydenham Valley Conservation Authority changed their name to the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority (S.C.R.C.A.) September 1974. They approved Todgham & Case of Chatham as surveyors and Ford, Gray & Simmons from London as appraisers. In January 1975 the province approved a $1.25 million grant for Phase II.

By February the cost of the project was up to $10 million and Sombra Township's 10% share was up to $57,500 over three years. Reeve Lorne Johnston's Council appealed the costs on the grounds the project was of no benefit to Sombra Township. He also wanted Sombra out of the Authority. To cut costs, the Authority tried to change the easements to include only their predicted extra 300 acres of incremental flooding rather than the original 2,600 acres affected. On October 22nd, 1975, Wallaceburg agreed to pay half of Sombra's share. An O.M.B. Hearing was held January 19th, 1976 to hear objectors and O.M.B. approval was given February 12, 1976 for Sombra to pay its 5% which was now $62,500 over three years.

Surveyors and appraisers spent months on the effected properties on the channel and above the dam. Then the Authority hired James Mason of Sarnia as negotiator No. 1 to present the offers to the landowners. All the channel landowners sold to the Authority except one George Frye at the west end would not sign off his property for the offered price; so it was expropriated. Over two years later (August 19th, 1980) the Land Compensation Board granted him almost double his original offer.

With the landowners above the dam mistrusting the Authority's intentions and deciding there was probably more strength in unity they formed the Wilkesport Dam Landowners Association in May 1977 with an executive of Paul Graham (President), Stan Yaku (Secretary), Alex Lecky (Treasurer), Charles Grant (Negotiating Committee Chairman), Malcolm Crawford and Richard Aarssens (Negotiating Committee members). This group made several attempts to meet with the Authority regarding their easement policy and intentions. One representative was finally allowed to attend a meeting in Strathroy in August 1977. The easement policy gave the Authority the right to flood the land — which was too open-ended for the landowners and couldn't be resolved. They also suggested the dam would be closed an average of once every six to ten years.

After Mr. Mason signed up only three properties out of about 120 the Authority registered the easements against the affected lands and in April 1978 sent notices of intent to expropriate the said lands. The landowners immediately hired solicitor William Tennyson who objected to the expropriation on their behalf.

The Authority arranged the viewing on May 15th of several thousand dollar dam model built by the Dillon engineers in Windsor for all the Authority members and politicians. When asked by the landowners executive if they could go, the Authority was hesitant to allow more than a few members to see it. So in early May a few landowners executive members met with Lorne Henderson seeking help to get information from the Authority and requesting a viewing of the dam model for all the landowners.

The Authority then gave their solicitor instructions to release all information on the project at his discretion. They also invited all the landowners to a separate May 29th viewing of the model. A meeting on May 30, 1979 was also arranged between the landowners executive and Authority technical staff and advisors. Subject discussed were the easement document, flooding effects even with the gates open, compensation, and the static flood line which did not allow for any back-up of water during flooding so that all the land to be flooded was not included in the easements. Moore Township landowners fell into this category and began to pursue the same end. However the Authority and M.N.R. would not change the static line, the easement policy, or anything else and continued on to the Hearing of Necessity to be held November 30th, and December 1st, 1979, where the landowners' objections would be heard.

September 9th, 1979 was the sod-turning ceremony. Sod, shrubs, a tent and chairs were set up at the west end of the proposed channel for the occasion. Guests included Provincial dignitaries Lorne Henderson, Darcy McKeough, Frank Miller (Treasurer) and James Auld (M.N.R.) and Authority members and politicians. The event followed by a lavish luncheon on Fawn Island. Also attending the sod-turning were several uninvited placard-carrying landowners peacefully demonstrating against the Authority's unwillingness to sincerely act on their concerns before the construction started. The digging of the channel began a few days later.

In November 1979 the project's name changed to the W. Darcy McKeough Dam and Diversion Project.

The Hearing of Necessity was postponed due to the illness of the hearing officer in November 1979, and then on December 1, the hearing was postponed indefinitely by the Authority to re-assess the amount of acreage needed for flood easements. In 1979, the Authority and M.N.R. had decided to re-survey and re-appraise the entire flood plain, but this time to the dynamic regional storm line which would accomodate a Hurricane Hazel type storm including the backwater curve. This new area went up to Highway 60 in Moore Township and involved 190 properties. On April 16th, 1979, Sombra Township Council objected to paying their share of any further acreage, and recommended that the land be bought out and resold with the easement attached to the deed. The Authority decided to acquire the floodplain land in lieu of easements.

Moore and Sombra landowners joined together in April, 1980. Sombra Township Council appointed two Councillors, William DeMars and Joe Dedecker as liaisons on the landowners committee; but at a meeting in May arranged and chaired by Dean Hunt between the Authority, Water Control Board and the Landowners' Executive, the liaisons were not allowed in. It was decided that the new Authority negotiators No. 2 should meet with the landowners' negotiators again which they did — three times. The landowners requested a choice of either easements, sale of affected land only or total buy-out of the parcel as each

landowner wished. They again requested changes in the easement document, written guarantee that there would never be a permanent lake, right to retain subsurface rights and right for vendor to lease back land taken from the original parcel. They also wanted answers regarding affected roads and bridges and concerning buildings not the floodplain but subject to flooding due to water backup.

The only concern addressed came in November 1980 when the Authority tried to get an Order-in-Council to leaseback purchased lands to the vendor to 1990 but by January 1981, they reverted back to predominately easement acquisition — with an even more restrictive easement document than the first one. They had run into problems with severances (parcels less than fifty acres and the legal description of the floodline on each parcel).

By this time, the first four contracts worth over $8 million were completed. This involved the digging of the five miles of channel and building the drop structure at the west end and three bridges over the diversion channel. Also, the 11th Concession bridge costing over $750,000 which was financed almost totally by the Authority, was opened in November 1980 by Lorne Henderson and Dean Hunt. This Bridge was built in lieu of a bridge over the diversion channel at the Callahen Sideroad.

The second survey of land above the dam was completed in February 1981. The appraisers and negotiators visited each property and when the landowners still wouldn't sign off, the Authority again applied for approval to expropriate land in April, 1981. Three years after the first attempt. The landowners now hired lawyers John Coates, expropriation expert, and Stephen Wequé of Borden and Elliot in Toronto with the assistance of local Sarnia lawyer Wallace Lang. The lawyers attempted to negotiate a settlement with the Authority without a hearing, but that was fruitless and 84 landowners proceeded to the Hearing of Necessity which was November 30th to December 9th, 1981 (7 days) at the Wilkesport Community Centre. In the meantime the Authority changed the project to the W. Darcy McKeough Floodway.

The basic purpose of the Hearing was to determine whether or not the taking of the lands or an interest by way of easement was fair, sound and reasonably necessary for the purposes of the Expropriating Authority. The hearing officer sent a lengthy report to the Minister of Natural Resources, who handed down his decision the end of March, 1982. He requested a change in the wording of the easement document and also easement acquisition rather than total buy-outs of some properties that the landowners wished to retain. Only the buildings on these properties were to be bought out and removed. The landowners were pleased with the results.

Once the Minister made his decision the expropriation was officially locked in. On June 25, 1982 the Expropriation Plans were registered on the titles of the affected properties. According to the expropriation timetable, the Authority was bound to make each landowner a Section 25 offer (offer of compensation) within three months i.e. September 25th. However, in mid-September the Authority asked the County Court for an extension of six months since the appraisals weren't finished. Lawyer Wequé objected on behalf of the landowners at a hearing in Sarnia September 23 and 24 where he discovered the appraisals were done but M.N.R. wanted to review them. The Judge ordered the Authority to either make the

Section 25 payments by October or he would grant them an extension to the end of February but they must include penalty interest at the prime rate. The Authority chose to pay only those landowners with buildings by October 9th and appealed the rest. Those with homes were to vacate by November 30th 1982 but the Authority granted them an extension to August 30th, 1983.

The next few months involved three different court battles with the Authority lawyers appealing the Judge's order to pay penalty interest and the landowners' lawyer trying to quash their motion of appeal. The Court granted the Authority their appeal but the Section 25 payments were still not made by February 28th 1983 so they were legally bound to pay interest back to the date of expropriation June 28th, 1982 which they had sought to avoid all along.

By the end of February the Ministry of Government Services took over all the appraisals, negotiations and land assembly matters from the Authority and would deal with the landowners themselves. They would now consider total buy-outs as well as the easements, whichever the landowners preferred. They were also willing to pay some legal and appraisal fees for the landowners which they were legally bound to do eventually. Some landowners elected to sell out and move. A few were refused. The majority preferred the easements. To date, some haven't been paid their Section 25 offers yet. Mr. Waqué has hired appraisers and engineers in preparation for the final court battle in the Land Compensation Board.

Sombra Township Council also had its problems. Late in 1980 Council became concerned about the lack of Authority action regarding their upstream roads and bridges. The Authority insisted that a report would be made after the final design of the dam had been set. In May 1981 the Authority identified several areas they felt needed upgrading and suggested that M.N.R. would pay only partial costs. On October 14th 1981 the Authority and M.N.R. met with Sombra, Moore Townships and Lambton County officials to begin talks. All the municipalities felt that the upgrading of roads and bridges should be at the expense of the Authority or M.N.R. since the higher more frequent flooding would be due to the dam. Concerns were also expressed over Wilkesport being an island, the cemetery flooding and future maintenance cost of the roads and bridges due to the flooding. In December 1981 the Authority and M.N.R. agreed to pay for a preliminary investigation of the roads and bridges affected by the project. Letham and Jarvela Engineering Firm of Sarnia was commissioned to prepare this report of Sombra and Lambton County. Terms of reference were established and field examinations were made.

On March 19th, 1982 Ken Jarvela produced his preliminary findings concerning the areas of most concern and general design criteria. He identified eight Township and five County locations, all in Sombra Township that needed upgrading for flooding. The Township requested 100% funding of the upgrading and a haul road agreement to be finished before construction of the dam commenced. By May 1982 Jarvela had established a cost estimate of the above floodproofing at $1.9 million for the Township and $4 million for the County. In July 1982 the Authority refused to pay Jarvela's total bill for the preliminary investigation. Then in August they asked Sombra and Lambton County for a list of priorities since they intended to carry out about $1 million worth of road and bridge work by March, 1983. The list was made. The work was never done.

On November 4th, 1992 the first meeting was held over the proposed haul road to the dam site. The Township wanted a written agreement signed that only the 10th Concession Road between new Highwey No. 40 east to Duthil Bridge would be used that the road would be maintained during dam construction and left in good condition when finished and that the Authority would pay for legal fees incurred because of the said agreement. Authority officials seemed agreeable and suggested that the road would probably be needed during the heil load season.

Early in 1993, the Assessment Department dropped the assessment on flood easement lands by 50%, which was a loss of revenue to the Township.

Contract No. 5 (construction of control gates) and Contract No. 6 (construction of control gate housing, control structure, 700 meter earthen dam and operations building) were let in Februery 1993 for over $4 million. At a pre-construction meeting in Wallaceburg on Febiuery 17th, the contractor told Sombra he would need all the 10th Concession Road from the Kimball Sideroad to the St. Clair Parkway as a haul road and wanted the hall load signs lifted immediately. Neither he nor the Authority would sign an agreement. Sombra Reeve Joe Dedecker and Deputy Reeve, Bill DeMars, told them they could not use the paved portion of the 10th or the Duthil Bridge and that the hall load limit would not be lifted until an agreement was signed.

A Toronto lawyer hired by Sombra Township wrote up a haul road agreement and tried to get the Authority to sign this and an agreement on flood proofing the upstream roads and bridges, but had no success. By March 9th, 1993 the contractor was seen hauling gravel over the 10th Concession Road to the dam site. Council members warned the contractor and the Authority to stop the hauling until the agreement was signed. They had no intention of signing any agreement and wouldn't stop the hauling so the Council asked for the help of Ministry of Transportation and Communication who immediately stopped the trucks. Not only were they over loaded for the Township roads, for the Provincial Highway No. 40 as well so they were fined and turned back to London, loaded. The truckers then refused to go to the dam site until the dispute was settled. The Authority still wouldn't sign, but the contractor was interested. However by April 6th, 1993 a written letter of committment was signed by all parties involved and the load limit was lifted on the 10th Concession Road from the Kimbolt to Highway No. 40 exclusive of Duthil Bridge. By June, the Authority refused to pay the lawyer's account as was agreed to in the letter and wished to have it taxed. To date the account hasn't been taxed and the Authority hasn't paid.

On September 12th, 1993, the Township and County were presented with Dillon's Position Paper on upstream roads and bridges for their review. The paper was prepared after studying Jervette's preliminary report. In short, Dillon changed the terms of reference that had been agreed to and left only $321,000 worth of work needed to be done. The Authority also wanted the Township to sign a release form agreeing not to hold the Authority responsible for any future damages. The Township said "No way".

The Township and Authority reached a basic verbal agreement on November 29th, 1993 with both parties backing down somewhat. This went to M.N.R. for approval.

The end of 1983 brought some good news and some bad news for Sombra. M N R. officially stated that Sombra would have to pay no more land acquisition costs. The bad news came when the Authority voted for Sombra to pay 5% of the Authority share (45%) of all future maintenance costs on the floodway

Today Sombra Township has a beautiful expensive dam north of the 10th Concession bridge (Duthil Bridge) 30 feet above normal water level The dam has a gravel road on top with sodded sides with steel gates and concrete control house. The Authority has developed a $356 000 site plan for this area, which includes a paved road across the crest of the dam, a maintenance road, caretaker residence, interpretive center implement shed, parking lots, interpretive trail, forest management area, boat launch ramp and dock, agricultural demonstration plot, wetland impoundment area and tree planting along the diversion channel slopes.

Since 1980, the Authority has been gaining some revenue by renting out the berms of the channel for crops and hay and the bottom of the channel for hay only They also lease the lands they acquire above the dam.

To date, the roads and bridges problem has never been settled. The buildings in the floodplain have not been removed, the Wilkesport and Duthil Cemeteries haven't been floodproofed some landowners haven't been paid and the Township lawyer hasn't been paid for the haul road agreement. Tenders for the demolition of floodplain buildings were let on February 15th, 1984

Yet, on February 14th 1984 with only a draft operating manual to follow the Authority closed the gates for the first time creating a flood above the dam that had never been seen before The two cemeteries were flooded the Kimball Sideroad and County Road 2 were closed as well as Township roads. Water wells were covered and houses outside the floodline were flooded through water back up.

On March 12th 1984 the Authority notified Sombra Township that the Ministry of Natural Resources has no funding available for floodproofing roads and bridges. The project has cost the Province over $30 million including legal survey and engineering fees and still isn't finished yet

CHAPTER THREE

INDUSTRIES IN SOMBRA TOWNSHIP

FORMER INDUSTRIES

When the settlers first came to Sombra Township the land had to be cleared of trees so they could build their houses and work the land.

Sawmills were set up at many places— Port Lambton Sombra, Riedshow and Wilkesport. At first grain was taken to Sarnia to be ground, but grist mills soon were set up in Port Lambton Sombra and Wilkesport. The big grist mill in Sombra Township today is owned by Russ Hazzard at Bachet

The Sicken Lumber Company located in Sombra Village on the corner of Water and King Streets, was very active in 1910 The Sickens were Marine City residents. They built several houses on King Street, east of the highway in the early 1900's. These houses were all built from the same plan

There were cheese factories at Becher and Sombra. The Becher factory was owned by J. S. Fraser of Wallaceburg. The cheese maker was Reg Watts of Wallaceburg, assisted by Chris Whale of Sombra, and the book-keeper was Mr. Fraser's daughter, Helen Rose, who later married Mr. Herb Burgess. She rode her horse, Barney, back and forth to work. When the factory closed, the building was sold to William Gibbons for a barn. It can be seen on Norman Workman's farm on the Lambton Line at Becher.

The Sombra Cheese Factory was owned by shareholders. In 1881, one share could be bought for $25.00. The president was J. S. Burnham and the secretary was A. A. Knight. In 1888, the president was John H. Soper and the secretary William S. Howell. The cheese maker was Dick Richmond, assisted by George Whale.

When the factory closed, Mr. Gordon Dalgety bought the building in July, 1908; and used it for the Thistle Rubber Type Works in the making of rubber stamps.

Sombra Cheese Factory

He was assisted by Raymond Smith, William Duncan, Myrtle Hamilton, Mey Trexler and several employees. Miss Clera Meyers did the office work. The office was over Shepherdson's Store until he bought the cheese factory.

The cheese factory had stood on piers out over the river. Mrs. Dalgety had it moved to her property at the end of St. Clair Street where the road turned and came out to the river. When Highway 40 went through in 1935, the building was moved further east on her property but now facing the new highway where it stands today.

After the death of Mr. Dalgety in 1913, Mrs. Dalgety and Miss Meyers, with the assistance of Bill Duncan, carried on until the elder son, Murray took over in 1919.

Murray died in 1963, and Morgan carried on with the assistance of Mrs. Harriet McKillican, until the end of 1974 when ill health forced both of them to quit. In 1975, Mrs. Murray Dalgety sold the building and contents to Mr. Jim Templeton of Port Lambton.

There was a box factory managed by Mark Stover along the dock west of the Sicken Lumber Company. Here they put paraffin on card board boxes to ship oysters or ice cream.

After Mark Stover was killed in a motor accident at Deleware, Ontario, this building was used as a beer scow until rum-running days ended in 1933.

In 1939 Harry Stewart bought the building for a barn and Jim Hagen moved it down the ice to its present location on Gordon Stewart's farm along the Snye. That's when the River St. Clair really froze over.

When the ice in the rivers got to be ten or twelve inches thick, ice cutting was the order of the day. Huge squares of ice were cut and hauled by team and sleigh to the ice house to be covered with the saw dust that was piled up in the yard after the buzz saw had cut up the logs, the men had hauled in for the next year's wood supply.

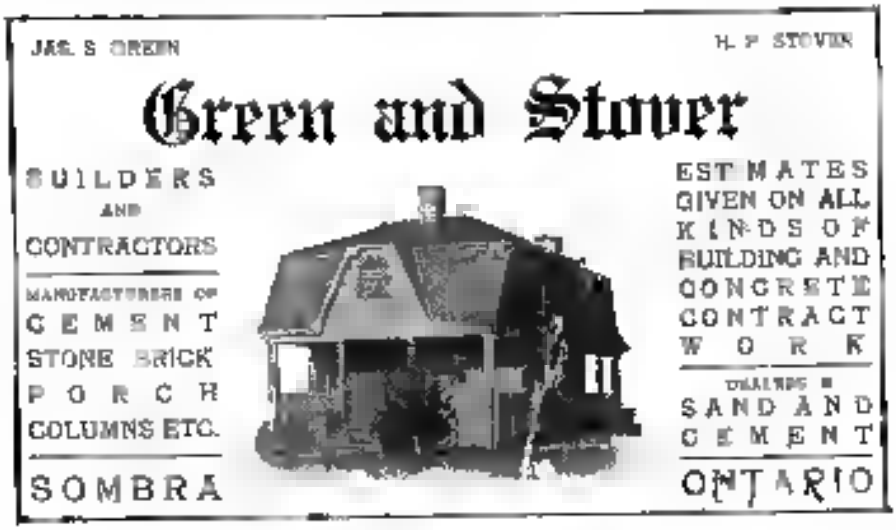
William Ansell had a Livery and Dray barn on Smith Street. Many people rented horses and buggies before cars became plentiful.

J. W. Callaghan was undertaker and embalmer in Sombra on the corner of Water and Smith Streets. He also had a good livery in connection.

J. W. Callegham Livery & Undertaking

The Hayes was undertaker at Wilkesport until he moved to Sarnia.

Jim Green and Hiram Stover made cement blocks east of the railroad track in Sombra, about 1905. They made pillars for porches, slabs and small blocks about the size of bricks. In 1906 these blocks were used in the building of the Grand Union Hotel and Joseph Stover's house.



Stover House

Lefer two other houses were built of these blocks in Sombra.

The Sombra Outlook was printed in Sombra from 1908 - 1914 by Harry Moore, who also bought the Courtright Sun

Sombra Outlook

Sandy Campbell had a shoe repair shop in the small building still standing on Smith Street beside Ansell's former livery stable. People coming in on the train or crossing the ferry often rented a horse and buggy from William Ansell to take them to visit relatives in the country

Mr Sid Helmer and Mr Lou Reynolds had chicken hatcheries north of Sombra. People from all over the township patronized them

Sombra clay is slippery and sticky when wet but it has qualities that make it excellent for tile and cement blocks.

The tile factory at Wilkesport started by Harvey Sipprell about 1904 supplied work for many of the young men in this vicinity and supplied tile to drain this wet township William Bishop bought the tile yard and he and his sons operated it before the boys joined the army Then John R Douglas owned it. After Mr Douglas died, the Ralstons bought it and finally Tom and Bill Colborne. In 1967 they sold the equipment to Emig Clay in Chatham. Then in 1968 Mr and Mrs. Paul Graham bought the property and raised pigs there Thailand was expropriated for the dam and was under high water in 1964 when Wilkesport flooded.

PRESENT INDUSTRIES

LAMBTON PIPE & SUPPLY

When oil was discovered in Sombra Township and oil wells dotted the landscape Turret Supply opened a centre in Sombra where the old station stood, and supplied pipes and liftings for oil wells Jim Huctwith, Jim McKenzie Les Worth Peter Boeyen and Alfred Henry worked there

Turret Supply closed in 1969

In 1971 Lambton Oil and Enterprises Ltd. started their own company with approximately twelve Oil Well Drilling Contractors.

In 1979 Don Lee bought the company and now he and his two sons, David and George operate the business known as Lambton Pipe and Supply

CHINOOK CHEMICAL

In September 1995 sod was turned for the Chinook Chemical Plant on Concession 10 Canada's only methylamines plant. It manufactures methanol and ammonia to form three types of amines. Its world-wide customers use these chemicals to produce antibodies and other pharmaceuticals, miniature printed circuit boards for electronics the wide range of patterns and colours in textiles, sensitizing agents for mining explosives, urethane fabrics and upholstery weed and insect control products, and swimming pool purification products.

It employs 29 local people.

LIQUID CARBONIC

Liquid Carbonic is the world's largest supplier of Carbon Dioxide This plant, situated at the corner of St. Clair Parkway and Moore-Sombra Townline, is one of the largest plants in Canada and they are planning on expansion For years they supplied oxygen to the local hospitals.

CANADIAN INDUSTRIES LIMITED

C-I-L — Lambton Works is an integrated chemical fertilizer operation located just south of the Moore-Sombra Townline. The plant itself occupies approximately 400 acres of a 2 000 acre site and manufactures a complete line of nitrogen

fertilizers and some of the phosphate fertilizers. The basic raw material is natural gas from Alberta and this is converted into ammonia in the plant which is rated at over 1 000 metric tonnes per day.

One of the unique products manufactured at Lambton Works is sulphur coated urea which is a slow release nitrogen source used in premium quality domestic fertilizers.

A portion of the ammonia is also used to manufacture two grades of ammonium phosphate and as a by-product from this operation they also manufacture hydrofluosilicic acid an agent used in the fluorination of municipal water supplies.

Lambton Works is the base unit of an extensive C-I-L agricultural system which includes a large number of downstream Agro "Marts". The Agromarts are blending operations supplying custom end mixtures of nitrogen phosphate and potassium for direct sale to the farming community.

Initial construction on Lambton Works started in the Fall of 1965 with first product being made early in 1967. At the present time the plant employs approximately 435 people in a wide variety of technical process and maintenance activities.

EDAPLAST

After World War II William Dehm started a business in Sombra called "Edaglast". They made photo corners and Scotch tape. After he moved to Ireland, Sombra Welding, owned by the Lajoie brothers and Joseph Kennedy bought the property and employed many local people. Sombra Welding went out of business in 1979. Bernard and Marcel Lajoie started up Besomer Manufacturing Co. in the same building. The name "Besomer" was made up of the first letters of Bernard, Sombra and Marcel.

In 1983 Townsend & Bottum amalgamated with Besomer and the Besomer Division continued to operate in the same building until the end of December 1993. They now use the building for occasional emergency work only.

For years it was the biggest industry in Sombra.

CHAPTER FOUR
COMMUNITY LIFE

Early settlers craved the friendship of their neighbours and needed their help. Women acted as mid-wives because doctors were far away. There were no telephones and it took hours to drive the horse and buggy to summon the doctor.

Bees were the order of the day. Quilting bees, threshing bees and barn-raising bees. Every farmer had a wood-bee in the winter. When the buzz-saw moved into the yard, the neighbours came and the sound of the saw told you there would be a big pile of wood in the yard to be chopped for next year's supply.

In the fall, there were the cider parties when the young people brought their picnic lunch, put the eggies through the cider press and ate their lunch and drank cider out in the Fall sunshine. During Fall and Winter there were husking bees in the barn with a good hot supper to follow. In the spring the maple syrup was made, and they had a sugaring off in the bush.

At barn-raisings, the men chose up sides to see which side would get their frame up first; so they could get to the supper first. The farmer's wife had worked and baked for days getting ready for the horde of hungry men. The neighbouring women and girls all came to help set the tables in the yard and serve supper.

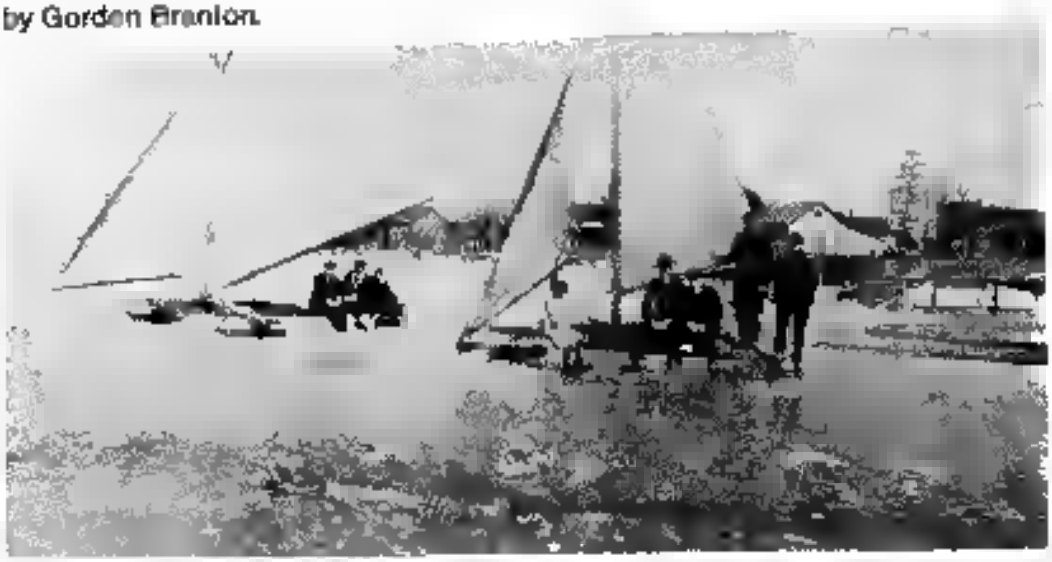
Barn Raising 1918

Ice boating was a great sport on the St. Clair River. The sails on a boat with runners were the power that carried the passengers at a fast rate up and down the river or across the river according to the set of the sail.

Traffic across the ice was heavy with foot passengers, sleighs or cars. After Christmas in Sombra Village Tom Whitely would collect the used Christmas trees and stake out a safe path to Menne City.

Without radio or television, people made their own entertainment. Sombra had a band and every village or church put on Christmas Concerts or plays after Christmas. Many fine talents showed up in amateur plays.

Sombra had a race track for several years around 1908 on the farm now owned by Gordon Branion.



Ice Boating

At The Races — Sombra

There was also a brass band in the village. Some of the members were Amos Henry, George Logan, George and Walter Meyers and L. Burnham.

September was often looked forward to in country school sections when a new teacher was coming to the school. Many a young teacher married a farmer in the section and so became a good member of that community.

In 1933 the Harmsworth races were run on the St. Clair River. Many men along the river front bought lumber and erected stands and printed tickets for one dollar per seat for the hundreds they expected to come and view the races. The visitors came to view the races, parked their cars and walked to the river bank and stood to view the races. Many men had lumber for which they had no use.

SELMAN GRANGE No. 898

This organization was formed in 1866. The members were called Grangers and were Patrons of Husbandry. They met in School Section No. 11. Then met in Wilkesport Hall.

It was a cross between a lodge and an agricultural society. The members were addressed as Brother Henry and Sister Grant. They were a close-knit society because one entry states: "We the Division Grange of West Lambton having heard the case referred to by Bro. Brown of patrons selling goods to outsiders would strongly recommend that goods bought through the Grange ought not to be sold to outsiders on any terms, believing that it was never intended by the Constitution of our Order."

Addresses were given on School taxes, Organization of Farmers and Essay on Gardens.

At every meeting they spoke about lunch which was often a feast of fruit of all kinds.

Some articles in the Constitution "Regular dues shall be ten cents per month for male members, five cents per month for female members and two cents a month for Juniors to be paid quarterly. No member shall be entitled to vote or receive the pass-word who is in arrears of dues."

Mrs. David Bowles was Flora among the officers in 1897. John F Rivers and Frank Rivers were members. The members had to be voted on and they were called Co-operators.

The Society's last minutes were recorded in December 1906 and all money in the Treasury was to be sent to the Treasurer of the Dominion Grange in Toronto.

SOMBRA TOWNSHIP AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY

In the late 1800 a a Township Agricultural Society was formed for the purpose of having a fair. The first minute books are missing but the January 1900 meeting is recorded as being held in Richmond's Hall, Wilkesport. Robert Stokes was president and W. A. Grant was secretary. An amusing excerpt from these minutes says the secretary-treasurer's salary will be the same as before or smaller if his conscience so directs.

Directors for the Fair were named and judges named for all classes from horses and cows down to fancy work and fine arts. Many meetings were held in Henry Stokes' Hall, Sombra, which was over his store which is now Hargroves. Sarnia, Brigden, Wallaceburg and Sombra were to be canvassed for donations and prizes.

Names of directors in the early years were Henry Stokes, Green, Boolhman, Ben Gibbons, Witherell, Pratty, Orra Bishop and Alonzo McLean.

The June 1902 minutes names Clara Boolhman and Mrs. Maggie Cox as judges. Ben Gibbons — in charge of the hall; Alonzo McLean, tickets and gate; F. S. Jaap, grounds. Judges were Dr. Stenton, Mrs. Rev. Parker and Mrs. A. E. Jones. Rent of $10 went to W. McGhee.

William McRae, who lived where Verne Fournie lived, sold the grounds to the fair board. The hall was built and the grandstand later.

The January 1903 meeting was in Richmond's Hall.

The July 1903 meeting was in Hamilton's Hall. Names appearing this year were Mrs. Wellon, Ed Ruttan, Robert Payne and Sippiell.

Names in the 1905 minutes were Manley Stubbs, George Shepherdson and Heddle. Membership was $1. President Lyman Henry died in March 1905.

In 1906 secretary-treasurer W. A. Grant's salary was raised from $36 to $45 a year. An annual grant was received from Council.

In January 1907, there was a motion to establish fair headquarters at Wilkesport. W. A. Grant was delegate to the Western Association of Fairs in Toronto.

1908 lady judges were Mrs. Wes Porter, Becher; Miss Clara Whitely, Sombra.

W. A. Grant was secretary-treasurer from 1900 to 1914 after which James A. Grant of Bickford held that office until Leo McCoy was secretary in 1918.

These donors of prizes in 1917 might be of interest: S. D. Crothers, Wallaceburg — $2.00 worth of dry goods, Brander's Drug Store, Thos. Harrison — cash, Cousins & Burlingham — a rocking chair, Merchants Bank of Canada, T. D. McGuire, John Glendinning, M. Golloghy, G. E. Norman, Cousins Bros. Grocery, O'Flynn & Burgess; L. H. Burgess, restaurateur — a box of candy; Snively & Sauvey, T. L. Johnston — a half-dozen photos, Herald-Record — one year's subscription to the paper, T. F. Hinnegan, Wallaceburg Bank of Nova Scotia, Brigden, L. H. Burgess also supplied refreshments at the fair stands for several years.

In 1917 Mrs. Wm. McRae from whom the grounds were bought, was to be interviewed regarding tapping into her late drain. Apparently nothing came of it because in 1918, a committee was to see to draining the grounds. Sid Helmer was to be paid $10 to plough and smooth the race track.

In 1919 motion was made that Council proclaim Fair Day a public holiday.

They also decided to interview the Aerial Department, Mount Clemens, about having an airplane for Fair Day. Nothing came of it.

Unfortunately the minutes are missing between 1919 and 1937. At that time James H. Grant of Becher was secretary. Names are now Bernard Many, G. M. Doyle, Herman Bicum, Miles Peters.

In March 1943 they voted to continue the Fair for the duration of the War, but an amendment to that motion was carried and the Fair was discontinued, but the Board continued to meet and in 1944, motion was made to rent the Fairgrounds to Verne Fournier for three years for $40.

In May 1946, at a special meeting, motion was made by Otto Bicum, seconded by Cleyton Workman that since the people are taking no interest in the Fair or meetings, that we dispose of the grounds and assets and close the books. Carried. The township now uses the property for gravel, trucks and scrapers.

WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

Women's Institutes have been a great source of enjoyment and entertainment to the Country Women and they have contributed much to their communities. The first Institute was formed at Stoney Creek, Ontario by Adelaide Hoodless in 1897. Offshoots of Women's Institutes are the 4-H Club and Junior Farmers.

When Lord Tweedsmuir was Governor-General of Canada, 1935 - 1940 his wife, Lady Tweedsmuir realized that the history of our country was disappearing as the older citizens died; so she suggested a worthy project for a worthy group and suggested that the Women's Institute of every community collect and write the history of their community. The Institutes agreed and named the histories "Tweedsmuir Histories". It was a wise suggestion and today the Tweedsmuir Histories are fascinating and true histories of our communities.

There were institute organizations at Becher, Wilkesport, Port Lambton, Sombra and Thornyhurst. The only active ones remaining in 1994 are Becher and Thornyhurst.

LODGES

There were Orange Lodges formed at Becher and Wilkesport and one in Sombra in 1883. The longest surviving was Becher which had a Ladies' Lodge also, but they both ceased in 1974 and the books were sent to Grand Lodge

Masonic Lodge was organized in Sombra in 1891 with Henry Roebuck the first Master Mesonic Building was erected in 1903

Oddfellows Lodge in Sombra was organized in 1908 Gordon Dalgety was the first Noble Grand.

Eastern Star organized in 1909 Mrs. Will Stover was first Worthy Matron This was the second chapter organized in Ontario. Members had previously attended in Marine City.

Rebekahs organized in 1919 Mrs. Manley Stubbs was the first Noble Grand

RUM RUNNING

During the Prohibition days in the United States from 1919 1933 other boats besides ferries carried on a cross-river business. They operated boat houses or any building close to the river and they were called beer scows. They were stocked with liquor and strung all along the St Clair from Point Edward to Port Lambton The liquor came in by train to the stations and was picked up by various men who carried it to the beer scows. Sometimes fictitious names were used to order liquor even names from cemeteries.

As long as the liquor was exported Canadian Law was not broken so many low boats and motor boats left the Canadian shore after dark loaded with liquor presumably for Cuba, but never got further than the American shore.

Floyd McPhail was the owner of a garage in Sombra and he was an excellent mechanic When a rum-runner had trouble with the engine of his motor boat he would seek out Floyd for help Floyd charged his regular patrons 75 cents an hour to fix their cars or tractors, but these big-time rum runners would pay as much as four dollars an hour if he could get that motor running by dark. Floyd loved engines and he said they had some beauties in their boats.

An amusing story is told about a farmer who picked up his order of "booze" at the station and took it up to the corner of the 12th Concession where a boat was waiting Before he let them unload, he demanded his money They paid him, unloaded his wagon, then pulled a gun on him and demanded their money back. He went home wiser and poorer, but that ended his purchasing of liquor for the rum-runners.

In 1925 there were thirteen beer scows at Port Lambton. The assessor made a special trip to Port Lambton for the purpose of assessing the beer scows which had been doing business for the four or five previous years without contributing to the Township Treasury by way of taxation. One of the village trustees asked the scow owners to contribute toward the upkeep of the roads which were being used to transfer their goods by wagon and truck from the Railroad Station. The idea met with opposition on the grounds that whom was up to the County Councilors Front Street formed part of the River Road, which was a County Road

These are a few excerpts from Auld Lang Syne:

May 1925 — The careteker of the Kellner export scow north of Sombra was relieved of $200 in cash and liquor when four masked men entered the scow eround midnight, making their getaway in e launch

February 1928 — The firing of several shots hy e couple of "bootleggers" who had been apprehended by the law on the Michigan side end made their escepe across the ice to this side, sent a hurry-up cell to the Provincial Police et Sarnia. Following in pursuit of the bootleggers wes a large car occupied by e couple of Port Lambton "temporary Citizens," who were commanded to hall by Officers Scott end Elliot who had quickly errived on the scene. Several shots were fired which fortunetely missed their mark. When the Officers found e couple of cesesof liquor elong the road, north of the village, they were placed in the Officers' car

When the police returned to their car efter inspecting certain premises, they found their prize had mysteriously disappeared One bootlegger efter spending the night in a nearby straw-stack walked over the P M. tracks to Sombra. Next day he returned to Port Lambton end while visiting the beer scows along the waterfront wes picked up by the police and teken to Sarnia jail.

March 1928 — One Saturday night an Americen Patrol Agent, Earl Roberts, was fatally shot hy e bootlegger from Lambton County The shooting took place neer Algonac.

When Mr Roberts and another officer ettempted to epprehend the men with his boat load of booze Roberts was shot in the stomach. His body crumpled into the boat end its owner sped toward the Canadian Shore, with the injured man After dumping the men on e Port Lambton dock, he headed for Sombra. Two men took the wounded officer into Dr Cathcart's office.

After the wounds were attended to, the doctor accompanied the two members of the Michigan Immigration staff to the St. Clair Hospital. The wounded man died the next day

UNITED FARMERS OF ONTARIO

In 1919 e United Farmers Of Ontario organized in Kelly's Hall, Sombra with 31 members. The first President was R A. Stokes, Secretary U S. Cody Their function was to order seed grain, oyster shell calf meal or fencing or binder twine in large quantities end sell to the members.

They started e U F O picnic in June et Vye's Grove on the 10th Concession It was beautifully shaded by maple trees and had e field for baseball which was the township's favourite sport. People came from miles around, watched the ball games, ate their lunches in the shade of the trees, then prepared to listen to the speeches and concert at night Bradshaw Port Lambton, Wauburno, Sombra end Thornyhurst ball teams often played

1925 William Vye was Chairmen Mr Ed Armitage, Reeve was e speaker In 1931 William McNeil was Secretary.

Programs consisted of skits by Maurice Minnie end Tom Weir, music by The Brunswick Trio of London, Alice Dunbar end bag-pipes end Scottish Dances with the Henderson Amusement Company

There were races in the afternoon. Some winners' names are Muriel Ansell, Rosana Johnston Ray Abrams, Rosco Gallameau Russell McPhail, Jean Ansell and Donald Washburn

Some names on the ball teams were Clifford Davis, Leslie Davis, Morgan Dalgety Murray Dalgety Floyd McPhail Tuffy Davis, Warren Hargrove Bernard Merr Jeffries, Shaw Lumley Arnold Renkin, Sheppard, Featherstone and Aiken.

CHAPTER FIVE
VILLAGES
BECHER

Becher is situated on the North Branch of the Sydenham River on the Lambton Line. It was named after Henry Beecher who owned considerable land in the County The second "e" was dropped in the early part of the century

There was a store, Orange Hall, Methodist Church and Anglican Church The school was on the West side of the Sydenham on Duff's farm and the children East of the river had to cross the ferry In 1905 S. S. No. 26 was built on the corner of 16 Sideroad and S. S. No. 13 moved the school to the 10 & 11 Sideroad on George Reid's farm

A hand-powered ferry was discontinued in 1931 when the bridge was built. Everyone had hoped for a bridge at Becher so finally a delegation from Becher Women's Institute went to County Council and presented their petition. A few years later the bridge was built. Leave it to the women to get things done.

A bridge to replace the first one was opened in 1951 when Dean Hunt was Reeve.

The mail was delivered from Wallaceburg and two rural routes went out from Becher Now those routes are all under R. R. No. 5 Wallaceburg.

The Ferry — Becher Ontario

BRADSHAW

A post office named for William Bradshaw the first postmaster. There was a store, a saw mill, a church and a school. The school is still standing and is the only one in the township being used as a Community Hall.

DUTHIL

Duthil was named after a parish in Invernessshire, Scotland. An early log school was built. In 1840. In 1880 the Grant Estate gave land and a Presbyterian Church was built. In 1925 it became a United Church and stood until 1964 when it was sold and torn down. A cairn marks the spot.

Duthil Cemetery is a few rods North of the church grounds.

A general store was across the road but a large tree that stood in the middle of the road was a real landmark. It was cut down in 1951

Landmark Tree at Duthil

PORT LAMBTON

Frances Baby from Detroit was the earliest white settler along the river at Port Lambton but the settlement was one mile below Port Lambton which came to be called Baby's Point. At its best, it attained a population of 150

Settlement at Port Lambton definitely began in 1820 when Duncan McDonald of Ohio built on Lot F Concession 7. He erected the first frame house in the township. His son, John D., erected a steam mill and became one of the leading businessmen in the Township.

The 1880 record describes Port Lambton as "the liveliest little river town south of Sarnia." It thrived on the lumbering trade because it had two saw mills, a shingle mills a planing and turning mill, a sash, door and blind factory and a grist mill all run by steam. A dock 450 feet long ran in front of the village and there was a Custom House, storehouse and warehouses. Serving the 450 inhabitants were eight stores, three hotels — The Grand Central, later called the Lambton Exchange and the Morning Star and British Hotel — three liveries, a telegraph office and a school.

There was a daily mail from Sarnia. The Erie & Huron Railway went through in 1886. The Pere Marquette bought the railway in 1902 and sold to Chesapeake and Ohio in 1947. The Ohio Hotel was built in 1907. Frank and Abbie Burgua bought the Washington Hotel in 1943. These hotels are both made into apartments. The Victoria Hotel was torn down in 1961. Ralph Brady built apartments on the spot with stores on the ground floor.

In the 1920's on the river side across from the Victoria Hotel was the Dansmere — a dance pavilion used for weekly dances in the summer and sometimes used as a hall for concerts. The White Star Line Dock was just south of the Dansmere.

Many are the excursions that went from the White Star Line Dock to Tashmoo Park. Excursion boats were Tashmoo, Wauketa, City of Toledo and the Greyhound. Mr. William Hinnegan was Customs Officer.

White Star Line Dock — Port Lambton — 1924

During the season, picnics sponsored by Sunday Schools, lodges, and bands ran one or two excursions a week and twelve hundred people were a normal crowd. It was a full day's pleasure jaunt — 35 miles downstream, six hours of fun at Tashmoo Park and 35 miles back, all for the modest price of 50 cents for adults and 25 cents for children. Sunday Schools got special rates, enabling them to take the children for 15 cents and still leave a margin for prizes for sports.

Around 1950 the Gordon-Fox Products had a manufacturing business making padlocks of various types. When this business ceased the Port Lambton Wood Products made wooden articles such as toys and drawer handles until the building burned in 1954.

Reedy and Cain had a hardware and lumber company from 1914 to 1971.

In 1950 Port Lambton Community Hall was built in memory of soldiers in both World Wars. The Roman Catholic Parish Hall was built in 1954.

Dan McEvoy was named Fire Chief in 1948 when the Fire Protection Committee was first formed in Port Lambton. He held that position until 1983 when he resigned. The township put on a dinner and he was presented with a 35-year plaque from the Fire Area.

Before this, Dan had received a 30-year long-service medal from the Ontario Fire Marshall's office. Tom McEvoy and Gordon Atkins have also received their 30-year long-service medals.

January 1976 — worst ice jam in years.

March 1976 — worst ice storm causing broken power lines, falling trees, telephone lines. Power off in some locations for days, causing people to be without heat and water.

1976 — heaviest snow storm.

1979 — a replica of Columbus' Santa Maria went up the river.

These excerpts are from the Port Lambton Tweedsmuir History.

PORT LAMBTON 1885

Its Popularity — as a summer resort. Its Probabilities, Its Possibilities and Its Businessmen.

Nestling coyly on the western shore of the wide smooth running river St. Clair some 25 miles south of Sarnia and a few miles north of Lake St. Clair the little village of Port Lambton is found on the map. Unpretentious in appearance, modest yet enterprising in the character of its inhabitants, it is within the Eldorado of the metropolitan citizen who in the sweltering weather of July and August seeks some sylvan retreat where cool and balmy breezes fan the fevered cheek and rest the business racked brain. All over the country its praises are sounded as a summer resort, and during recent years the people who every summer flock to some resort where there is immunity from dust, smoke, turmoil and bustle of commercial centres, are looking to Port Lambton as the best adapted to fill the requirements of summer boarders and the disposal of lots for summer cottages increases each season.

An advantage peculiar to Port Lambton is the fact that it is so situated that the prevailing south west winds of the summer season are tempered in their course over fifteen miles of water before they reach the shore, and the temperature in summer is invariably about twenty degrees lower than on the opposite side of the river. Another thing which makes the place attractive is the bathing, boating and fishing, the latter is especially enticing to the disciples of Isaac Walt, who can dangle their legs off the dock and haul in pickerel, bass, perch and other members

of the Iinny tribe while enjoying one of Peter Forbes best cigers As a summer resort Port Lambton stands high and in a few years will undoubtedly be the most popular in southern Canada Of the early history of the place but a brief outline can be given here gathered as it were from one or two of the old settlers, chief among whom is Mr J P Merritt, a descendant of good old U E Loyalist stock, who recounted to the Herald representative many of the things he remembers of the old days.

Away back in the twenties a surveyor by the name of Renkin, who owned land here which he obtained by patent from the Crown made the first survey but it was not until in the forties that other settlers made their appearances, when J D McDonald P J Merritt and Angus McDonald came in and took up some land the McDonald's being first It was a wild country then with neither clearings nor roads, and the two or three settlers toiled, cleared the land and waited development which came slowly.

In 1850, Phillip Donnelly made the survey for the village, laid out 10 acres — 5 acres each from the property of John D McDonald and John More McDonald — marked it off in lots, the first of which was purchased by Mr P J Merritt and located where Mr William McDonald's store now stands, shortly after Sydney Cook came from Ohio and purchased a lot He erected the first frame house in the still sparse settlement Cook worked on J D McDonald's farm clearing land and cutting cord wood and afterwards appointed the first constable of the district.

It was about 1850 that municipal organization was established and a post office was opened at Baby's Point, south of where Port Lambton is situated Among the first councillors of the township was Mr Merritt and in 1851 when Municipality was divided into wards he represented Ward No. 1 which included the fifth sixth seventh eighth and part of the ninth concessions but the whole ward only numbered 26 votes.

When the Post Office was opened at Baby's Point the name of Lambton was suggested but there being 2 other offices of that name Baby's Point was given it by the department with William Henderson as postmaster and it continued to be the post office for the district until early in the seventies when an office was opened at Port Lambton although Baby's Point office continued in existence until a few years ago, when the Port began to assume at least some importance in the geography and commerce of the county that was originally intended by those who sanctioned the survey of Lambton Lots, although it was not until the sixties that the faintest hope of the originators began to be realized About that time a man by the name of Kelly opened a hotel and accommodated his few patrons with lodging and meals and refreshments, but the rent for his rooms and the wear and tear of his chamber linen was limited in extent.

The first store was opened by Messrs. Merritt and McDonald, who carried a general stock, such as was adapted to the modest requirements of the yet sparse population, and of the men whom they employed in their timber and wood operation The next merchantile establishment was opened by James Henderson and he was followed by a man named Briggs, who came from Belleville and opened up a hardware store Sawmills erected by Mr Merritt and by Stodderd and Soule, were added to the industries but the timber having been depleted, these were some years ago added to the annals of the past.

In April 1867 the Methodist Church was opened and Rev Dr Marks was the first pastor, his membership at the time of the inauguration numbering around twelve. And full fifteen years ago the Catholic church was established here and these two places of worship continued to be the only religious edifices in the place.

The flour mills, erected some years ago by Mr J D McDonald for a while did a good business, but the wheels are now hushed in silence though the somewhat imposing building still stands as a monument to thrift and enterprise.

Many incidents and anecdotes illustrative of early times and the lives of the pioneers might be given did space permit but as a newspaper sketch only a brief outline can be given. Yet it is sufficient to recall old memories of those who tilled the ground in that unbroken wilderness and by the strength of their arm and indomitable will hewed for themselves a life in the forest where indians and the wild game had for centuries been in undisputed possession.

It is of the present that the Herald wishes to deal believing that there is a future which will make Port Lambton as famous as the renowned Saratoga, Long Branch Orchard Beach and other hot weather resorts, these facts are related for the good which may come of their dissemination as has already been mentioned, the writer knows of no place so admirably situated as this is for which it is inevitably destined to become — the favorite summer resort of Western Ontario. Brains, capital, enterprise are the three essentials necessary and if brains and enterprise are judiciously used, the other factor will be easily interested. The late Dr Tye of Chatham was one of the first to realize the advantages of the place and demonstrated his appreciation in the purchase of property and the erection of a summer residence which he enjoyed most thoroughly. He used to say it was the finest place in Canada for a sanitorium or invalid's home and it was his ambition to see such an institution established here but his plans were never sufficiently matured to put into practical operation.

Considerable enterprise is manifested by the present citizens, who are fully alive to the advantages they posses and with keen appreciation of the almighty dollar, they are alert each one in his own business to see that none of the necessary commodities which can be legitimately directed to their coffers, escape. Prominent among the firms, who uphold the honor of Port Lambton are the following.

O'Leary and Downs

This firm is composed of Mr James O'Leary and George Downs and they transact the most extensive business in Port Lambton dealing in timber cordwood, grain, etc. besides carrying on extensive farming operations. Both members of the firm may be termed what is now aday known as hustlers in turning the nimble sixpence and making them count into dollars. During the past winter at their camps in Dover and Sombra they took out nearly two million feet of sleve timber which finds a ready market at Fairhaven and New Baltimore Mich. and besides this large quantity of railway ties, ship lumber and cordwood have been put into marketable shape. The railway ties are supplied to the Grand Trunk, cordwood goes to Detroit and Port Huron and the ship's lumber to Marine City. To handle the stuff and run the farms between fifty and sixty men are employed during the winter months and about twenty-five during the summer months to attend to the refting,

towing etc. In which the tug "Sewell" and barge "Relief" are used, the latter in the transport of cordwood. Last season they handled about sixty thousand bushels of wheat oats, corn and barley at their two warehouses, situated at the dock and the Erie and Huron Station. Two farms of one hundred and four hundred acres each are owned in Sombra and another of three hundred in Dawn. These are being cleared up and put under cultivation as fast as the timber is removed, with the intention of going extensively into stock raising, and as the firm enjoys the reputation of making a success of whatever they undertake stock farming will undoubtedly be made to pay. In November last the firm sustained a severe loss in the destruction by fire of the International Hotel but they have faith enough in the advantages and prospects of Port Lambton to rebuild provided they can find an experienced hotel manager who will take stock in a syndicate and undertake the management of the institution. The village has much to thank Messrs. O'Leary and Downs for and the present popularity of the place is largely due to their extensive business operations and influences. Long may they continue to shed their influencing power over and around us.

SOMBRA

In May 1812 Samuel Burnham and Abraham Smith came from Syracuse New York and settled along the St. Clair River. The Burnhams took up land from the John Burnham farm on the corner of the 9th Concession to the 10th Concession where Mrs. Walter Burnham now lives. Samuel Burnham bought 400 acres at 25 cents an acre. The Smith family took up land from Maurice Minnie's corner North. That is how the Smith Line got its name. The first log house built by Sam Burnham was on the spot where Henry Barnes' house stands.

They came in May and the amount of work to be done that summer to provide shelter for the family before winter came, kept them all busy working early and late. Trees had to be felled and a log house built, besides providing food for the winter months. The woods were filled with all kinds of fruit and there was no blight for everything that grew in those days. There was plenty of honey too, but all they had to do with were their own two hands and their ingenuity. To save fruit, they hollowed out a block of hardwood, put the fruit in, covered it with honey and then sealed it with beeswax. Imagine if you started to can fruit without sealers or sugar!

In the book, "Lambton County's Hundred Years" by Victor Lauriston it states that Burnhams and Smiths settled here in 1821 but that is when the registry office opened in Sarnia and of course that is the first record the county would have, when people registered their deeds.

Meanwhile many families had come in, bought their land and cleared it. Gradually lumber was being demoted from its first place position as an industry and farming was taking over the top spot.

Wallace Mey had a blacksmith shop out in front of Allan Hargrove's property. William Hamilton had a wagon shop out over the water just north of the blacksmith shop.

The first school was built around 1820. It had benches for the children to sit on. This was a log building and was destroyed by fire around 1881. A two-room frame building was built the next year. In 1882 Jennie Cruikshank of Strathroy came to the village to teach Music and she was prevailed upon to teach in the Junior room until she married Will Stover in 1885.

They were looking for another teacher and they asked Hattie Whitely. She said how could she teach but Mrs. Mrs. Stover said, "You can read and multiply can't you?" Miss Whitely was hired and received $8.50 a month. None of these ladies had model school training but taught the children what they had learned at school. In 1886, Miss Eva Green was teacher in the Junior room and the principal was D. D. Mosher who later became Inspector of Public Schools.

In 1864 Sombra was under the St. Clair Mission. At the corner of Moore Townline and the River Road was the Reynolds Methodist Church. There was a Wesleyan Methodist Church on the lot where Clifford Shephard lives. In 1875 a Methodist Church was built on John Street.

In 1883 a Presbyterian Church was built for $1,302.00. This is the building where the United Church people meet now. The first Anglican Church was built on land where Riverside Cemetery is, but that Church burned, so land was obtained from George Ramsay and his wife Jane. Trinity Anglican Church was built on the corner of John Street about 1871.

Dr. Frank Seager, uncle of Bishop Seager was warden of the church about 1876, also William Watson and Alexander Meyers.

The history of St. John's R.C. Church was written by Maxine Devin and may be seen in Sombra Museum.

Doctors were Seeger, Campbell, M. McDonald and William Cathcart.

A drug store stood on the corner of King and Water Streets, just north of Kelly and Hughes Store.

George Logan had a tailor shop on the corner of King and St. Clair. When he became a Customs Officer he sold the business and the Sterling Bank moved into the building. A gas explosion on December 25, 1920 razed the building.

In November 1883 the "Valley Record" of Wallaceburg said — Mr. N. Cornwall is opening a Boot and Shoe Shop on Front Street, first door north of Waybrant's Hotel.

The village had a water pumping system just south of Sickens Lumber, but water was never pumped on Sundays or nights.

Water Tower, Sicken Lumber Company — Sombra, 1910

Sombra had a Chamber of Commerce organization. Their most noted activity was building the Community Hall in 1957. William Anderson, school principal, was President at the time and devoted much energy to it, but it was Frank Kellam who spent so much time and labour on it along with many other men of the community.

A Historical Society was formed in November, 1957 aiming to open a Museum in the township. They bought the former John Bury house. In 1881 that lot had cost $50 and it was 100' by 200'.

After much labour by the men and cleaning and papering by the women, it opened in June, 1959. Frank Kellam and Gordon Branton were very active in plastering, cement work, and general renovations. Very active workers in the beginning were Mrs. Eunice Henry, Mrs. Archie Highfield, Mr. and Mrs. Ree Grant, Mrs. Morgan Delgely, Mrs. Flo Rivard, Mrs. Ernest Bradley, Mrs. Mary Shoemaker, Mrs. Harold Gurd and Miss Kate Hamilton.

Today it is a great tourist attraction.

On John Street, Wilfred Johnston had hay and coal sheds and a cooperage shed. There were two elevators and stock yards along the railroad track.

There were two Imperial Oil Tanks and Louis Reynolds delivered truck loads of oil with his team of horses to various stores.

There used to be three grocery stores, a restaurant, a drug store, a meat market, a millinery store, a bake shop, 2 hotels, a barber shop, 3 service stations and Floyd McPhail's Garage. In 1984 there is a Pic' N' Pay Variety Store, no barber shop, no service stations and Floyd's Garage was bought by Baker Transit Parts who enlarged the building. There is a large restaurant which is very popular and a large library.

On May 11, 1984 an era ended in Sombra when Warren Hargrove died. His father William Hargrove had bought the General Store from W. C. Curtis in February, 1904. In 1918 Charles Doan became a partner and the store was known as Hargrove and Doan. After World War II, Warren came in as a partner. In 1955 Charlie Doan retired and William Hargrove died in 1965.

The community and the church lost a valued member in the passing of Warren Hargrove.

THORNYHURST

Thornyhurst was named after one of the first settlers by the name of Thornbury who built the first frame house which is on the McNeil farm. There was already a Thornbury post office so it was named "Thornyhurst". The first post office was in this house. Mr. Thomas Browning became post master and had the office in his house on Lot 8 Concession 3. Mr. Fred Verndell carried the mail from Wallaceburg by horse and buggy by way of Becher and Duthil, and dropping off mail twice a week at Brownings. The post office closed in 1912, so Thornyhurst then had rural delivery from Sombra.

Thornyhurst school is still standing but has been closed since 1964.

WILKESPORT

In 1869 Wilkesport was the head of navigation on the Sydenham River and was named after the Wilkes Brothers who were lumber dealers. It was a thriving hamlet of three hotels, three general stores, three blacksmith shops, one grist mill, one saw mill, one water power mill, one shoe store, one furniture store, one harness shop, one butcher shop, one jail.

Three steamers, the "Silver Spray" "The Henry" and the "Manitoba" a passenger boat plied the Sydenham. The "Manitoba" made weekly trips to Wallaceburg.

Four captains, Cook, Cranston, Crane and Kidd settled along the North Branch of the Sydenham.

Sailing boats loaded with white pine averaged from forty to sixty feet in length. Red Oak timber was shipped to the West Indies, to make rum barrels.

Elm was used to make flour barrels. One of the largest elm trees cut along the North Branch measured eight feet across at the butt. Cord wood was shipped to Detroit for fuel.

Boats had to be pulled upstream by oxen and man power. There were several banking grounds where rafts were made. Timber was hauled over a rail road with wooden rails running from Becher to near Florence.

In 1892 logs were jammed to the bottom of the river from Becher to Wallaceburg, causing severe flooding.

Professor Fred Landon, of Western University spent many summers in Sombra and wrote articles for the London Free Press. This article is entitled "Vanished Portion of Lambton County".

Ontario has many vanished villages and vanished ports as well, but you do not expect to find a vanished port six or seven miles inland from a navigable body of water. That is what makes Wilkesport in Lambton County out of the ordinary. We drove in from the St. Clair River not quite sure where the village lay and coming to a store, asked how far it was to Wilkesport. "You are in Wilkesport now" was the answer of the storekeeper.

There is not much visible today to recall this once busy lumbering centre where some of the finest lumber in Western Ontario was cut and where actually something in the way of ship building was attempted. Every sign of this has passed away and the once thickly wooded area is now definitely in need of reforestration.

Black Creek and the Sydenham River join here to produce the stream that moves sluggishly through grain fields toward the St. Clair. Today it will bear nothing more than a good size rowboat but plainly it was a much larger stream 75 years ago.

Tradition says that the first settler in this area was a Paul Sturdevant, an emigrant from New York State. A tombstone records that he was born in 1804 in New York State and that he died at the age of ninety a hardy old pioneer indeed. But also buried near by are Hiram Sturdevant who died in 1887 aged 52 and his wife Dorcas (Selmen) who died in 1954 aged 21.

The original Sturdevant is said to have arrived in 1930 to be followed a year later by one Hamlet Seles. About 1940 John Wilkes came from Brantford and established a mill thereby making the settlement a place of business. He acquired considerable land and in due time the settlement took his name But that was long time ago and there is no stone in the cemetery today recording anyone by the name of Wilkes.

The little cemetery perches on what was the high bank of the river at a time when the stream was many times larger than it is today There are probably many early burials for which no stone was ever erected It was not easy in the pioneer era to procure a stone and any temporary marker soon disappeared This makes it sometimes difficult to identify the first settlers whose names are handed on only in tradition. But from such stones as are to be found much may be learned about the beginnings of a community

As might be expected in an area contiguous to the St. Clair River there are sailors buried here Captain James H Rathburn 1853—1940 was with the Reiss Steamship Line for many years. His last command was the "A. M Byers' and he also sailed the "John A. Kling" and the "Charles C West' of the same fleet. Captain John Slover 1867 1918 was a well known skipper from these parts. He was with the "Hutchinson" fleet out of Cleveland at various times. It is recalled that he was on Lake Huron on the ninth of November 1913 when the most violent storm ever recorded broke over that lake sending nine ships and 79 sailors to their death but he managed to bring his ship into shelter at Manitoulin Island and thus survived the storm.

The Sydenham was navigable for small craft as far as Wilkesport Logs were towed on rafts to Wallaceburg and gravel was brought to the north side of the 7th Concession road. When the bridge was built at Becher in 1931 it stopped all navigation north

There were docks at every concession road and in the winter men cut cord wood and hauled it to these docks and piled it along the road In the summer it was put on the docks and sold to woodburning steamers and also for shipment to city

As the township was cleared and the steamers used other means of fuel supply the docks gradually disappeared.

Sugar beets were hauled down the Sydenham to the sugar factory in Wallaceburg.

When Imperial Oil was sending men from Canada to work in their oil fields in South America, Eldon Fournie of Wilkesport went as a pipefitter and plumber He sailed from New York on Christmas Eve 1920 went through the Panama Canal to Peru where he worked for three years and four months He learned to speak Spanish. After Peru, he was in Colombia for one year

In 1900 George Tyrrell joined the gold rush and went to the Klondike for seven years. After not finding gold he came back to Vancouver then went to San Francisco and worked as a carpenter rebuilding San Francisco, after the earthquake.

Wilkesport, Ontario

WILKESPORT COMMUNITY CENTRES

On October 30 1963 several people from the Wilkesport community pledged an average of $10 00 each to purchase the old Wilkesport School By April 10 1964, the deed was approved and the Wilkesport Community Centre Club was formed with Trustees Cyril Salisbury Harry Burgess, Gerald Shephard and Roy Sheffer in charge The secretary-treasurer was Elaine Salisbury

The hall was used mainly for euchre parties, Church functions, banquets, Hallowe'en parties and the odd bingo. Revenue was received through the euchre parties and rentals which were $7 00 a night or for a Church function or $10 00 a day Some minor renovations were done to create a stage and kitchen. The first Wilkesport picnic and parade began in July 1972 with local people donating food for the meal.

The local people decided that in order to benefit from government grants, they should turn the hall over to Sombra Township so on June 18, 1973 Council moved that they accept the deed of the Wilkesport Community Hall and that a bylaw be prepared to make this hall into a Community Centre under the Community Centres Act and a Board of Directors be appointed to assume the responsibility of management and control of the centre The deed was registered in the Township's name on July 11 1973 The first board was George Douglas (Chairman), Alex Lecky, Bruce Jackson Lorne Johnston (Council) and Dean Hunt (Council) with Ann Douglas (Secretary-treasurer).

Various events carried on with the addition of funerals, showers, elections and teen dances. A small ball diamond was built and the Board made plans to renovate and enlarge the hall. However at the annual meeting in March, 1975 they decided there wasn't enough local support for the renovations. In July 1975 the first pig roast was added to the picnic.

On January 9, 1976 the Board, with the support of the people, decided to look into buying more land and putting up a new hall. Several fund raising events were held such as six dances at Contright Hall, street dances, canoe races as an addition to the picnic and a 50/50 draw. In March 1976 the Board started proceedings to buy 12 acres of property from Gerald Shepherd. A severance was applied for and approved and a fence built around the severed portion. The deed was officially transferred to Sombra Township on November 30, 1976.

In February 1977, Council asked the Board to look into a 300 people capacity hall rather than the proposed larger one, but at the annual meeting on March 10, 1977 the people voted to go for the 500 people capacity hall. This Board consisting of Paul Graham (Chairman), George Douglas, Alex Lecky, Jim Duffy, Bill Caskeldi, Dean Hunt (Council) with Margaret Dawson (Treasurer) and Helen Pretty (Secretary) spearheaded the building of the new hall.

Fund raising efforts continued through 1977 and 1978 with raffles of quilts, beef, tarpaulin, rifle, Christmas Teddy Bear, leather purse, sink-the-car 50/50 draws, millionaire-for-a-day draw, auction sale, skate-a-thon, demolition derbys, tractor pulls, Countright dances, street dances, CHOK hockey ball games, student's Good Friday car wash, snowmobile races, horse ride-a-thon and a door-to-door canvas. Labour, machinery, material and money were donated by hundreds of people and companies in and out of the Township.

Land levelling, filling, parking lot and three ball diamonds were finished in these years. Brownies, Guides, Pathfinders, Cubs and Scouts started.

In July 1977, a 25% grant for the land purchase was received from the Ministry of Culture and Recreation. After checking out several lenders, the Board recommended to Council that Trustruction be given the contract for the new hall at a cost of $205,000. In August, 1978 Tristructure declared bankruptcy and Barnes Building Systems were given conditional approval to build the hall on September 11, 1978. The sod-turning took place in October, 1978 and the hall was officially opened on March 10, 1979 with 500 people attending.

In 1980 the old hall and property were sold to Terry McLaughlin.

A Light Fund Committee, under Dick and Pat Swain, was started in May 1993.

In 1994, the debenture was paid off.

A HISTORY OF SOMBRA TOWNSHIP

by Maude Dalgety
1984

FOREWORD

This book was written to record Sombra Township's History up to the Bicentennial year 1984 This is one of the Bicentennial Projects for Sombra Township The printing cost was provided by a financial contribution from the Provincial Government Every chapter has been read by one other person and to the best of our knowledge, is correct If any valuable information or names have been left out, it has been done inadvertently

I wish to thank everyone who has helped gather information with special thanks to Roberta Stewart, Lorna Graham, Gordon Branton and Clarence Moffat.

Maude Dalgety
May 28 1984

MAY

SOMBRA TOWNSHIP HISTORY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE — SOMBRA TOWNSHIP 1
Ferries 6

CHAPTER TWO — SOMBRA TOWNSHIP COUNCIL 10
Fire Protection 14
W. Darcy McKeough Floodway 15

CHAPTER THREE — INDUSTRIES 22
Former Industries 22
Present Industries 26

CHAPTER FOUR — COMMUNITY LIFE 27
Selman Grange 29
Sombra Township Agricultural Society 30
Women's Institutes 31
Lodges 32
Rum-Running 32
United Farmers Of Ontario 33

CHAPTER FIVE — VILLAGES 34
Becher 34
Bradshaw 35
Duthil 35
Port Lambton 35
Sombra 40
Thornyhurst 42
Wilkesport 43

CHAPTER ONE

SOMBRA TOWNSHIP

HISTORY OF SOMBRA TOWNSHIP

Sombra Township occupies the southwesterly corner of Lambton County and was the first block of land that the Crown acquired in Lambton County. Sir Peregrine Maitland, the lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada 1818 - 1828, a veteran of the Peninsular War in Spain, named the heavily wooded township "Sombra", which is the Spanish word for shade. The surveyors found it so densely wooded, it shut out the light of day.

From the Land Surveyor's office in Queen's Park, Toronto — The Township of Sombra called "Shawnese Township in the Western District" was surveyed in 1820 by Deputy Surveyor T. Smith, who wrote "There are about three days work yet to do in this township — The men were worn out by sickness and fatigue and had to quit. Mr. Ball, one of the assistant surveyors, lies dangerously ill. Perhaps there never was a more painful survey at the breaking up of the winter and the flat country being covered with ice and water three-fourths of the year. In the township, only the borders along the river for one concession deep are habitable. When these are settled, the rear side remains for the improvement of time."

Sombra Village was surveyed in 1854 by Henry Winters.

In Sombra Museum is the plan of a village called Lewisville with the same street names and plan of Sombra Village. It was named for Lewis Burnham, who had a store on the corner of Smith and Water Street. He also had the first windmill in Sombra.

The westerly boundary of the township is the St. Clair River. The first white man to go up this river was LaSalle, the explorer, in 1679. He was becalmed for a day on St. Clair's Day, near the head of the river and named this beautiful blue body of water St. Clair in honour of the saint.

The river made this township easily accessible to pioneers and encouraged early settlement. It was the scene of the first white settlement in the County by French settlers from Detroit, followed by Loyalists from the States, Scots on the Selkirk Settlement at Baldoon and later, numbers came from the British Isles.

Originally, Sombra Township was united with Kent County for municipal purposes and its southern boundary was the south limit of the present Gore of Chatham. In 1826, despite the sparse population, Sombra separated from Kent and was united to St. Clair (now Moore) Township with Walpole Island added for good measure. A number of white men had established themselves as squatters on Walpole Island. The treaty of 1827 set that area aside as an Indian Reserve so these whites were expelled and settled on the mainland.

In 1842 all the settlers elected Duncan MacDonald to represent them at the Western District Council at Bothwell, which was the centre of our Electoral District.

MacDonald petitioned that Council in May 1842 "for a road from Chatham to Wallaceburg and thence to the River St. Clair and along said river to the Township of Moore." A map of 1847, showing a road parallel to the river along all west Lambton, proves that his petition was granted.

To have a road was one thing, but to keep it up was another. Maintenance was by statute labour which was work on roads in lieu of taxes for which they were paid 15 shillings a day. Men who looked after the roads were called pathmasters. Lack of sufficient gravel, heavy wet soil and frost damage made dreadful roads. For instance, sometimes the surface was so bad during the spring and fall that the priest from Port Lambton between 1912 and 1926 had to cross the river to Robert's Landing, drive to Marine City, and cross at Sombra to conduct Mass in St. John's Church there. In 1934 the road was readied for paving and moved back in places, notably through Sombra Village and south of Port Lambton and largely paved in 1935 and completed in 1942.

The earliest settlers depended more on rivers than the roads for transportation. The Sydenham, named for Lord Sydenham, governor of British North America, 1838 - 1841, cuts across all Sombra's concession lines. Between 1882 and 1903, five toll ferries were put into operation across it. After a bridge was built at Becher in 1931, two ferries ceased to run. Two more stopped after Duthil bridge was built in 1950 and another in 1955. The last ferry — a hand-operated scow — ran to connect the east and west sections of the eleventh concession road until 1977 when Ernest Smith, the ferryman, retired. This road now has a large bridge built by the St. Clair Conservation Authority. Wilkesport bridge on 16 Sideroad was built in 1857.

Both the Sydenham and the St. Clair helped the settlers to dispose of their timber. On the St. Clair it was sold to steamers in the form of cordwood, while the output of elm and basswood along the Sydenham was floated to cooperages in Wallaceburg.

Although the cleared land proved heavy and hard to drain, except along Clay Creek and the Sydenham River, Sombra's leading industry has been agriculture followed by tourism and more recently by the production of fertilizers and chemicals. Modern machinery and more particularly extensive drainage allows 60 percent of the township to be devoted to cropland for the raising of soya beans, wheat, corn, barley, small fruits and vegetables. Considerable acreage has been effected by the building of the McKeough Dam to prevent flooding at Wallaceburg. In 1984, they closed the dam saving Wallaceburg from flooding, but Wilkesport suffered from high water.

Farming was the leading industry in 1890, when the township attained a population of around 4 000. That was more than double what it had been in 1861, and more than four times that of 1850. From 1890 on, the population declined to reach 2,951 in 1941. Since then it has increased and is now the largest it has ever been. In 1983 it was 4,274.

All Sombra Township was without a post office until one opened in Sombra Village in 1851, with Peter Cattanach the first postmaster. Shortly afterward William Henderson was the first postmaster at Baby's Point. When the post office opened at Wilkesport in 1852 the mail came in once a week on horseback from Louisville in Kent County.

Among the post offices named to honour Sombra Township people in addition to Wilkesport, for Charles Wilkes, and Baby's Point were: Becher, 1871 - 1970; Thornyhurst, 1874 - 1914 and Henry's Corners, 1900 - 1914; Duthil, 1908 - 1914 and Avonroy, 1882 - 1912 were named for places in Scotland, and Charlemont,

1892 - 1912 for a place in Ireland. Pardee 1910 - 1912 was named for F. F. Pardee, a federal member for West Lambton from 1905 to 1921. Bickford, 1888 - 1959 was named for an official of the Erie and Huron Railway. Another office named Terminus was open from 1892 to 1913. A local teacher named the Busyville office, which opened in 1871. Sombra Village, Port Lambton and Wilkesport are the only ones still open in 1984.

Though it didn't have the first post office in the township, Baby's Point in the south-west corner was the earliest settlement. It was named for the Francois Baby family, who came there about 1815. The French community which evolved built a church, Sacra Coeur, about 1827. It was the first Catholic Church in the county. A log building with masonry ends, it served the Roman Catholics of the township until they built St. John's Church in Sombra Village in 1870. The French Church was moved to Port Lambton and became a blacksmith shop.

By the 1870's the Catholic population had increased considerably. A new church was needed to accommodate the population, as the "Little French Church" at Baby's Point was small and in need of repairs. A new larger church was needed with perhaps a resident pastor to lighten the work load of the priest from Corunna. It was decided to build a new church in Port Lambton as the people were beginning to settle north of the point. A plot of land was donated by Mr. John D. McDonald and his wife in June, 1877. The men of the parish cut trees to be sawed into lumber. Much of the work was voluntary. This church was built on the corners of John and Merrill Streets in 1880. The frame was of large square timbers, a large brick building. This church stood until 1965 when a modern new church was opened on the site of the old one.

A directory for 1869 notes that Baby's Point has: "stages to Wallaceburg and Chatham, steamers to Sarnia and Detroit. Concession 8 is named the Point Line from the name Baby's Point, population 150. M. B. Cain, proprietor of the British Hotel; James Menton, the postmaster; and Rev. Father Kilroy, clergyman."

Father Kilroy was the priest of St. Michael's in Sarnia at this time but served a number of points throughout the county as well.

A memento of Beby's Point, the key to the Église de Sacré Coeur, is now in the museum in Mooretown. Little else save the name of the old community survives. In Sombra Museum is a letter dated 1881 asking permission to have a priest come from the United States to minister to the parish.

The telegraph line went through in 1870. Lambton Telephone Company sold shares and in 1910, the South Lambton Company was granted a franchise to erect lines back in the township. The first switchboard went into Shephardson's Hardware Store in May, 1899. Celia Shephardson was the operator, then it moved to Hargrove's Store. William Hargrove was operator when the store was open, and from two to four on Sunday. Later it was located in a small office in a house across from Hargrove's which has been torn down to make room for expansion of Baker Transit Parts. Among the operators were the Keyser sisters, the Bowles sisters, Sadie Dell, Marian McRitchie, Grace Huey, Irene Broad and Jean Henry. Many local men were linemen. Among them were: Ed Thomas, Ed Reedy, Tom Forbes and Harold Workmen.

Rey Hedegard was the last lineman when Bell took over about 1960. The original switchboard is in Sombra Museum. The system went on dial October 2, 1957.

Hydro was turned on in Sombra Village in 1924. It came later to the back of the township.

Old Highway 40 was opened in September, 1936. New 40 went through in 1977 at a cost of 18.4 million dollars for 23.9 miles.

The Parkway Commission was set up in 1966. Four parks in Sombra Township are well patronized. Cathcart Park, at the mouth of Cley Creek, was named for Hon. Bryan Cathcart, a member of the Legislative Assembly.

Land was donated on the west side of the highway by Harry Cundick in 1957, to make a park. It has a beautiful bathing beach and tables. Gordon Branton, as ex-warden, worked with other ex-wardens to get the property east of the highway for the Lambton-Cundick Park. It has a large trailer park at the back and picnic tables at the front and is very popular.

Reagan Park, south of Sombra, was named for Dan Reagan, a township road maintenance man.

Brander Park, south of Port Lambton, was named for a very fine druggist of Wallaceburg. He started the Rose Trail along Highway 40.

In 1903 Sombra became a police village and remained so for 70 years. By 1973, the village tax base was not large enough to provide the street and shore maintenance that was needed. It voted to rejoin the township, where industrial taxes allow for better service.

In 1885, the Huron & Erie laid the rails from Sarnia to Chatham, and in March, 1886, the first passenger train went through. Mr. George W. Smith was the first station agent in Sombra village and the first ticket stubs are in Sombra Museum. A man paid 55 cents for a ticket from Sombra to Tupperville in March 1886. The Pere Marquette was the next owner. Chesapeake & Ohio owns the railway today. The last passenger train was in April 1934.

Natural gas came into the township in 1917. Mr. Alex McRitchie had an implement shed next to Hargrove's Store. He and Mr. William Ansell set up a depot for the installation and repair of gas services for the homes here.

Along the walls, they drove in pieces of pipe to hold longer lengths of pipe of various diameters and they had elbows, nipples and valves in bins arranged in order over the floor space. They themselves did not actually install or hook up the services; but they entered into contract with the prospective customers and Mr. William Henry, who acted in a way as a tenant, went under the different houses to make all the connections leading in from the meters. Many houses had gas lights until hydro came in 1924.

There were four street lamps in Sombra village and Frank Stover got 25 cents a week for lighting them.

On Christmas morning, 1920, Ed Mullins, the janitor at the Sterling Bank in Sombra went into check the building and found the gas out. He lit a match to light the stove down in the basement. The leaking gas ignited and blew him up to the

first floor, the building was flattened and windows in all the buildings nearby were broken Mr Mullins had no injuries, just singed eyebrows and hair

The building pictured below replaced it

Installation of sewers in Port Lambton and Sombra was started in 1974, and the process of laying sewers on back streets continues to the present time.

Sombra and Port Lambton had their own pumping systems with frequent shut-offs and the taste of chlorine, prevelent at times.

In 1977, the water line from Lake Huron was laid, so now we have water pleasing to the taste and seldom a shut-off It cost $2 6 million It was constructed by Aztec Contractors and has a capacity of 2,900 gallons per minute.

The township bought water from the pipeline at a cost of 75 cents per 1,000 gallons. Each household was charged $225 for hookup.

SCHOOLS

1962 was the last year of the one-room schools. The Province declared larger school areas with bus service

In Sombra Township, two areas were established, the east half and the west half The East Sombra School was opened in 1963 The Trustees elected were Garnet Branton Robert McGee, George Davis, Clarence Shaffer and William Crowe, and they appointed Bruce McCallum Secretary-Treasurer

In the west portion the school named Riverview School was opened in 1964 The Trustees were Grant Watson Gordon Bicum Jack Beggs, Sam Wesley, Allen Elliot, Clarence Moffat was appointed Secretary-Treasurer

Then the Province made the township into one school area and the Trustees elected to the Township Area were Grant Watson, Gordon Blcum Jack Beggs Gernef Brenton and William Crowe, and Clarence Moffat was appointed Secretary-Treasurer

In 1969 the Province declared there would be only County Boards, and all assets were to go to the County and that Sombra Township and Dawn Township together would be allowed one representative to the County Board Representatives have been Grant Watson Joanne Highfield, Lorne Smith, Kenneth Baker

In the first World War, the boys of Sombra Township answered their country's call and enlisted in the 149, Lambton's Own Regiment. Many of them spent months at Camp Borden before going overseas The men from Sombra Township who served in the first World War were, along with others:

Charlie Bishop
Archie Bishop
Beattie brothers
Pte Hugh A. Allen
Sgt Ernie Smith
Sgt. George Smith
William Fox
John Tulloch
Walter R Browning
Sapper Fred Myers
Major Jim McRae
Cpl Hugh McRae
Allan Dell
Frank McRae
Norman Broad
Gunner John Luckman
Louis Henry
George Johnson
Clifford Stokes
Herold Stover was *in the Air Force*
Guy Forbes
Sapper Elmer Shova
Cpl. J H. Selmen
Ivan Young
Lloyd Shepherd
Howerd Beggs
Wm McAllister

In the Second World War, they enlisted in the Army, Navy and Air Force Those serving in the Second World War were, along with others:

Jack Hart
Jack Yorke
Joe Card
Warren Hargrove *D.F.C.*
William Anderson
Harold McKillican
Frank Doan
Murray Ellis
Donald McKillican
Capt. F C McRitchie
Mac Henry
Sam Plain
Joe Gormley
Robert Minnie
Charlie Washburn
Oscar Yorke
Richard Henry
Donald McRitchie
Ken Walton
Bob McPhail
Russell King
Clifford (Tuffy) Davis
Harry Reedy
Gordon Sterling
Harry Barnes
Ray Hazzard
George Kerr
Sheldon Browning
Robert Buckingham
Gordon Tulloch *Albert*
Clarence McKnight
Wilf Dennis
Grant Watson
Alistair Horley
Walter Horley
Andy Poland
Cy Salisbury
Richard E Brown
Wilbur Linfo
Reg Kerr
Kenneth Browning
Charlie Hunter
Leslie Tulloch
Bert Huey
~~Alfred~~ Henry
Warren Henry

FERRIES
PORT LAMBTON FERRY

Before 1880, Henry M McDonald of Port Lambton ran the first ferry from Port Lambton to Roberts Landing He used a row-boat holding four or five passengers, then a sailboat

George Bradley also rowed passengers over, for five cents each way

John D McDonald bought the business from Henry McDonald and ran the "Nellie H", a steam ferry

George Roberts was the next owner He was the first ferryman at Port Lambton to have a gasoline motor launch, "The Pilot". It was built in Detroit and it took him two days and a night to bring it up from Detroit After he sold the business, he became Customs Officer at Roberts Landing; which was named for his great-grandfather a pioneer of Michigan Notes from George Robert's widow "In May of 1901 people were cutting their lawns, but the ice in the river was so heavy that freighters and a passenger boat "Mary" were stranded in the ice in front of Port Lambton The crews ran out of food, so some hardy souls made their way to land to replenish the galleys, and Port Lambton grocers and butchers did a heavy business while the ice remained."

Julius Cook of Detroit owned the ferry and his two nephews, George and Charlie Davis of Port Lambton, operated 'The Jewel" about 1903 - 1908 This docked at the White Star Line dock beside the Dunsmore Pavilion Many passenger boats such as the 'Tashmoo" and the "Hiawatha" docked here for excursion passengers to Stag Island or Tashmoo Park.

William Bedford of Roberts Landing owned the buisness in 1914 His two sons, Ray and Roy, operated the "Reliance' a gasoline launch.

He sold to Jim Ansell of Port Lambton, who ran the "Owl"

In 1919, Webster Dawson of Port Lambton bought the business and operated the ferry with the help of Herbert Roberts At this time motor cars were getting more plentiful and Web Dawson had a towscow built to carry four cars. So Herb Roberts brought the first car over on the scow pulled by the launch 'Owl", a one cylinder Gray marine engine

Earl Dawson assisted his father and they had motor driven scows built — the "Larry D" and the "Lu".

John Jillson worked on the Dawson Ferry for ten years. In 1958, John and his brother Peter, bought the business They bought the "Ontamich" in 1973 "Ontamich" is a combination of Ontario and Michigan. Later John left the partnership and in 1983, Peter sold the business to Lowell Delgety of Sombra.

Customs officers were Hugh Deming Ab Mickle. George Logan Clifford Nixon, Rendle Purser. William Hinnegan, Iven Young Scotty Pearson and Roy Clark. Now the Customs and Immigration officers alternate between Walpole Island, Port Lambton and Sombra.

SOMBRA FERRY

Before 1880, Samuel Whitely started the first ferry from Sombra Village across the St. Clair River with a sailboat called the "Silent". When there was no wind, he used a row-boat He charged ten cents a round trip. In the winter when the ice was not all safe, he had a boat with iron runners on the bottom to shove over the ice; then when they came to open water, they all got in and rowed across

After Samuel's death in 1888 his son Tom Whitely took over and used the same boats until he got a small steam ferry called the "Comfort" Captain William Gale ran the ferry for Mr Whitely, also Mose Doan.

The railroad went through in 1885. After that many people crossed on the ferry, and then took the train to their destination. Freighters came into dock; also wood-burning vessels used to dock here to load up wood.

William Ball also ran a ferry at the same time from a dock in front of Washburn's Hotel. He started about 1884 and ferried over thirty years. He used a sailboat named the "Marian", but later converted it into a gasoline fueled boat. The launch "Marian" burned at the dock on August 18, 1912 when the gasoline tank exploded. He then had the "R. B." named after his son Roy Ball. It was also a motor launch. Mr. Ball went out West for three years and sold his business to Earl Johnson of Marine City. When Mr. Ball came back, he bought his business back, but soon he took sick and sold his business to Joe Miller of Marine City.

There was great opposition between the two ferries run by Joe Miller and Tom Whitely. The Canadian Customs Office stood on the river bank in front of Wm. Stover's Office and Joe Miller ran his ferry from a dock at the foot of Smith Street. Arguments arose because Tom Whitely was a Canadian and Joe Miller was an American. Things became so bad that one day each ferry was only allowed to go to the middle of the river. The Ferrymen came to terms because the passengers didn't like changing boats in the middle of the river. The ferries were to run on alternate days. Finally Mr. Whitely bought out Joe Miller, so there was only one ferry business after that between Sombra and Marine City.

Whitely's first motor boat was a converted yawl named the "Whitely". Mr. Whitely built his first tow-scow about 1912. This carried a team and wagon and later one car. Then he built one to carry two cars.

The cement block Customs house was built in 1919. For many years the life-sized lion on top of the Customs office was a land mark, put there by Tom Whitely who died in 1933.

Custom's House & Dock — Sombra, Ontario

In the 1920's, the launches were "Miss America No. 1" and the "Cadillac" there were two tow scows carrying tour cars each. Tom Whitely's son, Delos, assisted his father in the business and a large motor launch was named the "Delos W" Delos Whitely was drowned off this boat in 1934 The business was then sold to an American, Frank Johnston, and he bought a motor-driven scow named "The Wit" to hold six cars. This did away with tow-scows.

On August 9, 1947, the pilot of a small plane had been making short flights with his plane until around 6 p.m., when he secured the plane at the dock in Marine City, Michigan.

The seaplane NC 2309 was a 65-horsepower Aeronca — 7 A. C. S At 7 15 the pilot decided to fly his plane to Pearl Beach to moor it for the night He then examined his mooring line and found same in good condition. He proceeded to turn on the ignition on both magnetos and crank the throttle, and then step out on the pontoon and crank the propeller. The motor of the plane failed to respond at first and the operator continued to make alternate adjustments and cranking the propeller until finally at approximately 7 45 the engine suddenly started and at that particular instant large swells, caused by passing motor boats, were rolling in and caused the seaplane to surge or bounce This bounce and sudden forward motion of the plane when the engine started put a severe strain on the mooring line and caused said line to part The forward motion of the plane threw the operator off the pontoon into the river He tried to hang on to the pontoon, but the sharp metal edges cut his hand and prohibited him from holding on

The plane then taxied out into the river, and after making several complete circles in the river, headed directly toward the ferryboat "Wit". At approximately 100 yards from the ferryboat, the plane struck some swells which caused it to bounce three or four times, with the next bounce sending it aboard the ferryboat It struck the apron and came to rest on the after end of the vessel, with the motor still running

The motor vessel "Wit" had aboard some 30 passengers and crew of two, plus one automobile. Said vessel was on a scheduled trip from Sombra, Ontario to Marine City, Michigan at the time of the collision There were no personal casualties aboard the "Wit".

The "Wit" then completed her crossing and moored at her berth in Marine City, where the plane's operator came aboard and shut off the plane's engine The seaplane was last inspected at the Detroit seaplane base on 28 July 1947 and the pilot had 600 hours successful flying time.

The present dock at Sombra was completed in 1940 The Customs office was built in the next year and in 1941 the officers moved into their new quarters. When the office was moved to the government dock, the old office became a residence and the lion was taken off by Hans Werner who had bought the business from Frank Johnston. Mr Werner kept the business only a short time and sold it to Morgan Dalgety and George Dean in 1948 The 'Wit" was named the 'Ariel D", and registered in Canada. The "Ariel D" was sold and the 'Lowell D." was put into service here until the "Baldean" was built in 1951 This was built at Erieau and brought up through Lake Erie, Detroit River and Lake St. Clair. This is a large steel ferry carrying twelve cars and one hundred passengers.

A new Customs house was built in 1973 Customs and Immigration Officers were Andrew Mullins, 1879 - 1884, Asa Cronk, 1884 - 1890, Henry Roebuck, 1890 - 1897, Alexander A. Meyers 1897 - 1907, John Burnham 1907 - 1929, Harold Stover, 1929 - 1956 Other officers were William Laing, who later moved to Ottawa Stuart Clark, who died in 1978, Harold McKillican who died in 1981, and William Anderson. Now the Customs and Immigration officers alternate between Walpole Island, Port Lambton and Sombra

Other Custom's Officers up to the present time are

Arthur Meere, retired	Thomas Atkins	Bill Sterling
Harry (Jumbo) McFadden *	Douglas Chnstopher	Bob Grass
Gerald McConnell	Roy Clarke *	Bob Oliver
Harry Reedy	Don Crundwell	Herb Stephenson
Henry Lauzon	Murray Huckle	Nick Fngle
Robert Sterling		

* — DECEASED

April, 1984 was a month like never before The winter of 1984 was one of the hardest winters felt in these parts with the thermometer hovering near 0°F in January On January 21, the radio said it was the coldest day of the century So much ice was made February was a lovely mild month and everyone hoped we wouldn't pay up for it in April, but we did

The North wind blew for days and there were thirty miles of ice in Lake Huron River St. Clair filled with ice and Sombra ferry didn t run from April 6 to 29 It was one of the worst ice jams in history

Freighters were stranded in ice from Hersen's Island to Sarnia. Ice breaker "Mackinac" and Coast Guard Cutters had to escort the freighters one by one through the ice The "Des Groseilleurs" from Montreal came to their assistance The Coast Guard decreed one way traffic each day On Easter Sunday, there were sixty ships waiting in the Detroit River to come North twenty in Lake Huron to go South and ten at various places in the St Clair The cost to shipping companies was in the millions.

CHAPTER TWO
THE TOWNSHIP COUNCIL

The first official record of municipal organization was in the year 1822. Sombra Township and Dover Township were united, and there was listed in that territory 8 frame houses, 1 stone house, 103 horses, 154 oxen; 229 cattle The assessors for that year were Dennis Drouillard and John Hamilton. The tax collector was Robert Crow

The council at first met at homes. In years 1851 and 1852 at Robert Mowbray's, River St. Clair. 1853, Wm Henderson's, Baby's Point; 1854 James P. McDonald. Baby's Point; 1855 to 1857, Alexander P McDonald's, Baby's Point; 1858 and 1859, John Kerby's, Sombra.

From then on the council met as follows: 1860- Good Templar's Hall Sombra 1861 and 1862, Sombra House; 1863 to 1867, Good Templar's Hall, Sombra. There were two meetings held in Wilkesport in 1867 on May 11th and November 4th

In tha year 1867 a town hall was built in Sombra Village. The first meeting was held in it December 30, 1867, and met regularly there until 1885. In the year 1885 about one half of the meetings were held in the town hall and one half in the Central Hotel, Wilkesport.

From 1886 tha meetings became fewer in Sombra Village, until in 1892 the regular meetings were held in Wilkesport until 1967, when the Municipal Building was built south of Sombra Village. Meetings in Wilkesport have been held at:

1892	– Hayes Hall	1911 to 1914	– Regan's Hall
1893 and 1894	– Janning's Hall	1915 to 1917	– Lorengan's Hall
1895 to 1898	– Shaw's Hall	1918 to 1921	– Hamilton's Hall
1899 to 1901	– Richmond's Hall	1921 to May 1950	– Women's Inst. Hall
1902 to 1908	– Hamilton's Hall		
1909 to 1910	– Mason's Hall		

In the year 1950 an extension was built on the Clerk's office at Wilkesport and the council met there from May 1950 until 1967. The town hall at Sombra was sold to George M. Shephardson in the year 1897. The clerk's office was built at Wilkesport in the year 1916. The clerk's office is now the Library in Wilkesport, opened in November 1981.

Here is an excerpt from December, 1852 minutes: "Moved by Mr. Kimball, seconded by Mr. Merritt that the afsefsors of each ward be paid the sum of ten shillings." (Note the spelling when double "s" was used in a word.) British currency was used until 1857. The school grant for the township in 1852 was £14. 12. 1-1/2.

In 1854, Council met at the home of James P. McDonald, Baby's Point. Another excerpt from the minutes: "Inspectors of Houses of Public Entertainment — A. W. Watson, 1st Ward; Duncan M. McDonald, 2nd Ward; Lionel Stewart, 3rd Ward; Hiram Little, 4th Ward; David Grayson, 5th Ward." Estimate of current expenses of the Township of Sombra in 1854 was £91. 16. 2-1/2. One pound five shillings was paid to James McDonald for the use of a Council room in his house for one year.

In 1860, Council moved to pay eight dollars a month to a destitute person when he needed it. The names of Samuel Whitely, Andrew Mullins and Jacob Dingman appeared in the minutes. Petitions "praying" the Council to open roads were granted by a by-law. Two thousand dollars was at the disposal of Council for improvement of roads and bridges in the township. (Note the difference in 1964.) There were 366 names on the assessment roll of whom:

'6 are twice placed there

11 are woman

12 whose votes are not good

2 are aliens

1 under age

1 dead

4 who have left the province"

Needless to say, the voter's list was corrected. The treasurer's salary was $60, clerk's $100, Assessor $60, tax collector $100 and auditor $8 per year.

In July 1860, $42 was apportioned for planking a part of the River Road in front of the south half of Concession 11.

We call the east and west roads concessions, but the concessions are really pieces of land conceded to the land owners and the roads take their number from the concession north of them. Thus this piece of road being planked, would be Sombra Village South.

In 1858 a petition was sent to the Attorney General with regard to widening the road along the St. Clair River after it had caved in and been lost

In 1859 a by-law was passed for the regulation of Taverns, Houses of Public Entertainment and stores selling liquors. The Council procured $1 000 to distribute seed grain to farmers of the township who were in need of assistance The December 1859 meeting dealt with setting the size of S. S No 12, and No 10, also exempting the parsonage in Sombra from taxes. Rev. M Morden was the minister

The population was 1,485 and there were but four taverns in the township so Samual Whitely was granted one for the Sombra House

In March 1881 Tavern licenses were granted to John Kelly and John Highland. Council received a petition from farmers on Concession 11 saying their lands were covered with water because ditches on Concession 11 and 12 were dug wrong.

On June 24, 1867, there was a motion by Andrew Smith that $50 be paid to M. L Burnham for plank for sidewalks in Sombra Village In September 1867 tenders were opened for building a Town Hall in Sombra there being three tenders as follows. William Knight, $1,792, A. A Meyers, $1,600 and Aaron Kirby $1 350 Mr. Kirby's was accepted. Two town lots had been bought from John Hinnegan for $130 and Henry Winters had been paid $25 for drawing the plan and specifications for the hall Mr Forsyth, township clerk and Jason Holt were named a Commission to be inspectors. The first Council meeting in the new hall was December 1867

In 1869 Tavern licenses were issued to Sam Whitely James and Wm Morden, Messrs. Cain and McEvoy Jos. Adare and Angus, and John Kelly Shop licenses were issued to Daniel Dawson and James Henderson County assessment was $1,258.72

In 1870 James McNulty was granted a tavern license in Port Lambton

The Council furnished posts and the first telegraph line was built from Wallaceburg to Port Lambton and Sombra in the year 1870.

The Reeves of Sombra Township were:

1850 Lionel Johnston
1851 William Kimball
1852 A.P. Toulmin
1856 Daniel Meyers
1857 William Kimball
1857 Robert Mowbrey
1858 James Dawson
1861 A. P. Toulmin
1862 William Kimball
1863 A. P. Toulmin
1866 James Dawson
1872 Peter Cattanach
1873 William Kimball
1874 J S Burnham
1875 Andrew Smith
1876 William Kimball
1878 Henry Winters
1879 William Kimball
1880 J. D McDonald
1886 J W Snider
1889 Peter Grant
1897 Neil Grant
1901 James Bowles
1905 Thomas Boothman
1909 Neil McGurgan
1912 Neil Grant
1916 John Huay

1920 Alfred Selmen	1942 Clarence Moffat	1970 James Moran
1922 Victor Green	1947 Harry Sheller	1974 Lorne Johnston
1924 Edward Armitage	1950 Gordon Branton	1977 Dean Hunt
1927 James Huey	1957 Shephard McCallum	1980 Joseph Dedecker
1936 Samuel Carrothers	1964 Gordon Branton	

Sombra Township Reeves who have held the Office of Warden of Lambton County are:

A. P. Toulmin	John Huey	Gordon Branton
James Dawson	James Huey	James Moran
Peter Grant	Shepherd McCallum	

John Huey was Clerk of the County from 1920 to 1950.

For Sombra Township's Centennial effort, the beautiful large Municipal Office was built south of Sombra Village in 1967, when Gordon Branton was Reeve.

Clerks of the Township have been:

1864 W. Peterson	1876 Arthur Henderson	1922 Edgar Henry
1864 Peter Cattanach Jr.	1885 Orra Bishop	1926 Roy E. Bradshaw
1866 Andrew Mullins	1903 William McGhee	1972 Maurice Burke
1874 John D. McDonald	1913 William A. Scott	1983 John DeMars

The longest standing Clerk of the Township was Roy Bradshaw. Mr. Bradshaw began his long association with Sombra Township when he assumed the Treasurer's position in 1925. He moved up to the post of Clerk a year later.

Author of a book on the municipal history of the township, Mr. Bradshaw was well-acquainted with the municipality's history and procedure. He knew the township well and had a vast amount of information at his fingertips.

In September, 1969, Township Council honoured Mr. Bradshaw with an 80th birthday celebration at the Port Lambton Parish Hall.

Mr. Bradshaw retired in January, 1972 and he died on May 24th., of the same year.

Sombra clay has been the butt of much ridicule and was the concern of the Council for many years.

Prior to 1931 the roads in the township were all clay except the roads which had been designated County roads and had gravel. In the early 20's the Kimball Sideroad was paved as far North as Lambton Line. Having lived on the Lambton Line, half a mile from the Kimball sideroad, I remember one Spring the mud on the Lambton Line was hub-deep and that pavement was so near, so my brother hitched the team to the car, pulled us through the mud, tied the team in S. S. No. 26 school yard and we went to Wallaceburg by car to do our shopping.

Prior to this, ditches constructed on the side of the road served two purposes: to drain the adjoining land and also to build up the road.

When automobiles became more numerous and they could only be used in dry weather (they were jacked up in the garage during the winter) people began to think that better roads should be supplied. When the Government collected license fees for autos, they returned a portion of the money to the township in the way of a grant for road maintenance.

In 1936 Sam Carrothers, while espiring to the Reeveship, presented the people with a program whereby he would put gravel to everyone's property and it would not cost over five mills, by using the subsidies from the Ontario Government. The people in the township accepted his proposal and for six years the Reeve and Council were returned by acclamation. That was the foundation on which later councils have continued to build and improve township roads.

In 1942, Sam Carrothers was appointed Road Superintendent and continued in that capacity until 1965. Other Road Superintendents were:

Clifford (Tuffy) Davis	Ronald Johnson
Oliver Dawson	Sam Dunseith

Another resident who has served the township well is Clarence Moffat. In 1919, he became Secretary-Treasurer of Carlisle School and remained so until he became the Township's Central School Board Secretary. It became a County School Board in 1969 and Clarence was retired. He was on the Sombra Township Council for fifteen years, serving five years as Reeve. He belonged to the Firemen's Association and received a plaque from them after serving them for thirty years.

FIRE PROTECTION

In 1948, ratepayers in the Southwest part of the township asked the Township Council to form a Fire Area bounded on the north by the centre of the 10th Concession in the east by the County Line and the west by the St. Clair River. The first committee appointed to manage this Fire Area was: Percy Johnston, William McNeil, Howard Myers, Glen Payne. The committee arranged with the trustees of Port Lambton Village to operate and man the area equipment and Dan McEvoy was named Fire Chief. In 1948, a position he continued to hold until 1983.

The remainder of the township was designated as Fire Area No. 2. Fire protection was arranged for Area 2 by buying the services from surrounding Fire Areas such as Fire Area 1, Moore Township Fire Department and Tupperville Fire Department until 1968 when Fire Area 2 decided to provide their own protection and built a Fire Hall at Wilkesport and bought a pumper fire truck.

In 1975 further protection was provided by building a Fire Hall at Becher and the purchase of another pumper truck.

In 1981 an addition was built to the Wilkesport Hall. Now in 1984, the township has three Fire Halls with four pumper trucks, two emergency vans and eighty volunteer firemen.

Fire Chiefs in Area 1 have been	Dan McEvoy, 1948 – 1983
	David Moran, 1983 –
In Area 2	Jack Swain
	Herold Romph
	Wilbur Shepley
	Owen Watson, now for 12 yrs.

When Area No. 2 went for their own protection the committee was:

Cal Jackson
William Huey
Bert Peters
Clarence Moffat

Sombra Township 'a Council in this Bicenfannial year is:

Reeva	Joseph Dedecker
Daputy Reeve	William DeMara
Councillors.	Lorne Graham
	Stevan Miller
	Romaina Vandavenne
Clark	John DeMara
Treasurar	Jaan Wafson
Enginaar	Larry Bumham

W. DARCY McKEOUGH FLOODWAY

Probably fha longast, most controversial issue ever fo affecf Sombra Township was this project, originally cafled the Wilkesport Dam and Diversion Project. Although the general public first learned of it through a special four-page insert in fhe newly formed Wallaceburg Courier Presa in Dacembar 1972, the Sydenham Vallay Consarvation Authority's Project No. 65, as if was called, was well on its way on paper

A preliminary engineer's report had already baan compiafad by Auguaf 6th, 1971 affar a requasf fo the Authority from Wallaceburg on April 1st, 1970 fo undartake a feasibility study to construct a dam and diversion south of Wilkeaport on fhe North Sydenham River. The Authority approved fha undartaking of the study on April 14, and received a $25,000 Provincial grant June 10th, 1970 for fhe said study.

This Dillon Report described a flood confrol project involving a dam 28 feet above normal wafer level at Duthil a 800 acre reservoir and a five mila diversion channel travelling from jusf north of the dam west along the midpoinf of the Tenfh Concession to the St. Clair River. Tha report suggested two alternatives for fhe channel- navigable and non-navigable. Tha firsf choice preferred by the Dillon engineers involved a wet channel as an extension fo fha reservoir at an estimated cost of $6 4 million. The second had a dry channal excepf during floods at an estimated cost of $5 5 million, excluding land acquisition and final engineering.

On August 31st, 1972, fhe Authorify adopted alternative No 1 as Projecf No 65 conditional that the non-grant portion, (45%) of the projecf was cost-shared by the benefitting municipalifies. Wallaceburg (80%). Chatham Township (10%) and Sombra Township (10%). On October 13th 1972, the Authority submitted a brief requesting the Minister of Natural Rasources' approved of the now $8 million project. This proposal involved the qcquisifion of 450 acres of land for the diverelon channal plus 1 800 acres for the 'lake' and five feet of free board (585' level). Tha resf up fo 597' (Hurricane Hazel level at the dam) would have a flood easement bought. The purposes oufiinad were flood control, recreation, stream flow augmentation and pollution abafamanf. Sombra Township's share was to be $27,500 over three years. However, on December 22nd 1972, no approval was given by the Minister as "funds are not available at this fime."

This was fhe fima that fhe previously mantioned Authority-sponsored Courier Press insert arrived in the homes of Wallaceburg and Sombra Township residents. It described the project as the best solution for eliminafing flooding in Wallaceburg with added recreational features like sandy beaches, blue water and sailing boats. The last poinf alone was enough to plant the seed of suspicion in those who knew the clay-bottomed, silty Sydenham; so fhay attempted to get information including

the Dillon Report from the Authority Lorne Henderson, M P P and Sombra Township council After obtaining either little or no information from each source and being told extra copies of the Dillon Report were not available a group of Sombra ratepayers called S O S. (Save Our Sydenham) was formed with President, Walter Scott; Vice-president, Paul Graham; and Secretary, Robert Sauvé with the hope that a group would be more effective.

Meanwhile, on March 5th, 1973, the Authority appointed a special Steering Committee whose purpose was to further Phase II (Land Assembly 1973-75) and Phase III (Final Engineering and Construction 1976 - 78) of the project They pressed on obtaining approvals from Wallaceburg and Chatham Township Councils, support from Lorne Henderson, Lambton M P P and Darcy McKeough Kent M P P, and conditional acceptance from the Ministers of Natural Resources and Environment — one condition being that the Authority must meet with Sombra Township. Aerial mapping and photography began in May, 1973 after a $2 500 Provincial grant was approved

The S O S group requested a meeting with the Authority before it was any further committed to the project, but were told there would be no meeting until the mapping study was completed S.O S. now felt that due to the character of the river, the reservoir would take thousands of acres of prime bottomland out of production to be replaced by cattails and stagnant water, and had to convince the Authority to drop the lake idea and preferably the whole dam project On July 16th, 1973, they presented their Council with a 1,048 name petition of Sombra landowners opposing the dam because of loss of bottomland disruption of drains, tax increases and debris entering the St. Clair River The Authority finally agreed to hold a meeting on July 23rd, 1973 with the S O S executive who presented them with a copy of the petition opposing Project No. 65 and with an alternate flood control plan for Wallaceburg included smaller dams at each bridge, removal of the Center Bridge in Wallaceburg and dredging of Running Creek and the mouth of the Snye. The proposal was immediately rejected as being too costly and ineffective The Authority was very upset with the S.O S. for not waiting until completion of the study.

On July 27th, 1973, word came down from Toronto "the project is postponed indefinitely" The S V C A. still continued on with the study and then tried to meet with Sombra Township Council, who refused as long as the project was postponed. S.O S also continued their battle with lobby letters to government officials and non-Wallaceburg media coverage to get support to stop the project forever — not just indefinitely The S V C A. used the Wallaceburg media to defend their position. The lines were drawn The bitterness had begun

S V C A. finally arranged a closed meeting with Sombra Township Council and an open meeting afterwards on December 17th 1973 at East Sombra Central School The Dillon engineer was there to explain the project to a gym full of Sombra people, some S V C A and M N R officials and a few biologists, naturalists and an invertebrate zoologist from Toronto, Sarnia and Ottawa, respectively, who were concered about the water quality and depth of the reservoir However, the engineer announced that the Authority had dropped the lake idea and opted for the dry diversion channel

The Authority again wrote up another brief for M N R. approval in January, 1974. This one included only the dam and dry diversion channel, and changed the

land acquisition to 450 acres for the channel and 100 acres for the dam site and flood easements only above the dam north to the Avonroy Road to the 597' elevation — still at a total cost of $6 million. Wallaceburg and Chatham Township requested the S.V.C.A. to proceed with Phase II. On February 6th, 1974 Sombra Council led by James Moran met with the landowners directly effected by the project and decided to strongly oppose the project. S.O.S. tried to convince the S.V.C.A. members by letter that the project was too costly, both monetarily and socially, that the engineering data was incorrect and that Wallaceburg would still flood.

At the S.V.C.A. Annual Meeting on February 21st, 1974, the Authority members voted 16 to 9 against proceeding with Phase II. Wallaceburg now threatened to drop the Authority.

The Sydenham Valley Convservation Authority changed their name to the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority (S.C.R.C.A.) September, 1974, they approved Todgham & Case of Chatham as surveyors and Ford, Gray & Simmons from London as appraisers. In January, 1975, the province approved a $1.25 million grant for Phase II.

By February, the cost of the project was up to $10 million and Sombra Township's 10% share was up to $87,500 over three years. Reeve Lorne Johnston's Council appealed the costs on the grounds the project was of no benefit to Sombra Township. He also wanted Sombra out of the Authority. To cut costs, the Authority tried to change the easements to include only their predicted extra 300 acres of incremental flooding rather than the original 2,600 acres affected. On October 22nd, 1975, Wallaceburg agreed to pay half of Sombra's share. An O.M.B. Hearing was held January 19th, 1976 to hear objectors and O.M.B. approval was given February 12, 1976 for Sombra to pay its 5% which was now $62,500 over three years.

Surveyors and appraisers spent months on the effected properties on the channel and above the dam. Then the Authority hired James Mason of Sarnia as negotiator No. 1 to present the offers to the landowners. All the channel landowners sold to the Authority except one, George Frye at the west end, would not sign off his property for the offered price, so it was expropriated. Over two years later (August 19th, 1980), the Land Compensation Board granted him almost double his original offer.

With the landowners above the dam mistrusting the Authority's intentions and deciding there was probably more strength in unity, they formed the Wilkesport Dam Landowners Association in May, 1977 with an executive of Paul Graham (President), Stan Yaki (Secretary), Alex Lecky (Treasurer), Charles Grant (Negotiating Committee Chairman), Malcolm Crawford and Richard Aarssens (Negotiating Committee members). This group made several attempts to meet with the Authority regarding their easement policy and intentions. One representative was finally allowed to attend a meeting in Strathroy in August, 1977. The easement policy gave the Authority the right to flood the land — which was too open-ended for the landowners and couldn't be resolved. They also suggested the dam would be closed an average of once every six to ten years.

After Mr. Mason signed up only three properties out of about 120 the Authority registered the easements against the effected lands and in April 1978 sent notices of intent to expropriate the said lands. The landowners immediately hired solicitor, William Tennyson, who objected to the expropriation on their behalf.

The Authority arranged the viewing on May 15th, of several thousand dollar dam model built by the Dillon engineers in Windsor for all the Authority members and politicians. When asked by the landowners executive if they could go, the Authority was hesitant to allow more than a few members to see it. So in early May, a few landowners executive members met with Lorne Henderson seeking help to get information from the Authority and requesting a viewing of the dam model for all the landowners.

The Authority then gave their solicitor instructions to release all information on the project at his discretion. They also invited all the landowners to a separate May 29th viewing of the model. A meeting on May 30, 1978 was also arranged between the landowners executive and Authority technical staff and advisors. Subject discussed were the easement document, flooding effects even with the gates open compensation, and the static flood line which did not allow for any back-up of water during flooding so that all the land to be flooded was not included in the easements. Moore Township landowners fell into this category and began to pursue the same end. However, the Authority and M.N.R. would not change the static line, the easement policy, or anything else, and continued on to the Hearing of Necessity to be held November 30th and December 1st, 1978, where the landowners' objections would be heard.

September 8th, 1978 was the sod-turning ceremony. Sod, shrubs, a tent and chairs were set up at the west end of the proposed channel for the occasion. Guests included Provincial dignitaries Lorne Henderson, Darcy McKeough, Frank Miller (Treasurer) and James Auld (M.N.R.) and Authority members and politicians. The event followed by a lavish luncheon on Fawn Island. Also attending the sod-turning were several uninvited placard-carrying landowners peacefully demonstrating against the Authority's unwillingness to sincerely act on their concerns before the construction started. The digging of the channel began a few days later.

In November, 1978, the project's name changed to the W. Darcy McKeough Dam and Diversion Project.

The Hearing of Necessity was postponed due to the illness of the hearing officer in November, 1978 and then on December 1, the hearing was postponed indefinitely by the Authority to re-assess the amount of acreage needed for flood easements. In 1979, the Authority and M.N.R. had decided to re-survey and re-appraise the entire flood plain, but this time to the dynamic regional storm line, which would accomodate a Hurricane Hazel type storm including the backwater curve. This new area went up to Highway 80 in Moore Township and involved 180 properties. On April 16th, 1979, Sombra Township Council objected to paying their share of any further acreage, and recommended that the land be bought out and resold with the easement attached to the deed. The Authority decided to acquire the floodplain land in lieu of easements.

Moore and Sombra landowners joined together in April, 1980. Sombra Township Council appointed two Councillors, William DeMars and Joe Dedecker, as liaisons on the landowners committee, but at a meeting in May, arranged and chaired by Dean Hunt between the Authority, Water Control Board and the Landowners' Executive, the liaisons were not allowed in. It was decided that the new Authority negotiators No. 2 should meet with the landowners' negotiators again which they did — three times. The landowners requested a choice of either easements, sale of affected land only or total buy-out of the parcel as each

landowner wished. They again requested changes in the easement document, written guarantee that there would never be a permanent lake right to retain subsurface rights and right for vendor to lease back land taken from the original parcel. They also wanted answers regarding affected roads and bridges and concerning buildings not the floodplain but subject to flooding due to water backup.

The only concern addressed came in November 1980 when the Authority tried to get an Order-In-Council to leaseback purchased lands to the vendor to 1990, but by January, 1981, they reverted back to predominately easement acquisition — with an even more restrictive easement document than the first one. They had run into problems with severances (parcels less than fifty acres and the legal description of the floodline on each parcel).

By this time the first four contracts worth over $8 million were completed. This involved the digging of the five miles of channel and building the drop structure at the west end and three bridges over the diversion channel. Also, the 11th Concession bridge costing over $750,000, which was financed almost totally by the Authority, was opened in November, 1980 by Lorne Henderson and Dean Hunt. This Bridge was built in lieu of a bridge over the diversion channel at the Callahan Sideroad.

The second survey of land above the dam was completed in February, 1981. The appraisers and negotiators visited each property and when the landowners still wouldn't sign off, the Authority again applied for approval to expropriate land in April, 1981, three years after the first attempt. The landowners now hired lawyers John Coates, expropriation expert, and Stephen Waqué, of Borden and Elliot in Toronto with the assistance of local Sarnia lawyer, Wallace Lang. The lawyers attempted to negotiate a settlement with the Authority without a hearing, but that was fruitless and 84 landowners proceeded to the Hearing of Necessity, which was November 30th to December 8th, 1981 (7 days) at the Wilkesport Community Centre. In the meantime, the Authority changed the project to the W. Darcy McKeough Floodway.

The basic purpose of the Hearing was to determine whether or not the taking of the lands or an interest by way of easement was fair, sound and reasonably necessary for the purposes of the Expropriating Authority. The hearing officer sent a lengthy report to the Minister of Natural Resources, who handed down his decision the end of March, 1982. He requested a change in the wording of the easement document and also easement acquisition rather than total buy-outs of some properties that the landowners wished to retain. Only the buildings on these properties were to be bought out and removed. The landowners were pleased with the results.

Once the Minister made his decision, the expropriation was officially locked in. On June 28, 1982, the Expropriation Plans were registered on the titles of the affected properties. According to the expropriation timetable, the Authority was bound to make each landowner a Section 25 offer (offer of compensation) within three months i.e. September 28th. However, in mid-September, the Authority asked the County Court for an extension of six months since the appraisals weren't finished. Lawyer Waqué objected on behalf of the landowners at a hearing in Sarnia September 23 and 24 where he discovered the appraisals were done but M.N.R. wanted to review them. The Judge ordered the Authority to either make the

Section 25 payments by October or he would grant them an extension to the end of February, but they must include penalty interest at the prime rate. The Authority chose to pay only those landowners with buildings by October 8th, and appealed the rest. Those with homes were to vacate by November 30th, 1982, but the Authority granted them an extension to August 30th, 1983.

The next few months involved three different court battles with the Authority lawyers appealing the Judge's order to pay penalty interest and the landowners' lawyer trying to quash their motion of appeal. The Court granted the Authority their appeal, but the Section 25 payments were still not made by February 28th, 1983, so they were legally bound to pay interest back to the date of expropriation, June 28th, 1982, which they had sought to avoid all along.

By the end of February, the Ministry of Government Services took over all the appraisals, negotiations and land assembly matters from the Authority and would deal with the landowners themselves. They would now consider total buy-outs as well as the easements, whichever the landowners preferred. They were also willing to pay some legal and appraisal fees for the landowners which they were legally bound to do eventually. Some landowners elected to sell out and move. A few were refused. The majority preferred the easements. To date, some haven't been paid their Section 25 offers yet. Mr. Waqué has hired appraisers and engineers in preparation for the final court battle in the Land Compensation Board.

Sombra Township Council also had its problems. Late in 1980, Council became concerned about the lack of Authority action regarding their upstream roads and bridges. The Authority insisted that a report would be made after the final design of the dam had been set. In May 1981, the Authority identified several areas they felt needed upgrading and suggested that M.N.R. would pay only partial costs. On October 14th, 1981, the Authority and M.N.R. met with Sombra, Moore Townships and Lambton County officials to begin talks. All the municipalities felt that the upgrading of roads and bridges should be at the expense of the Authority or M.N.R. since the higher, more frequent flooding would be due to the dam. Concerns were also expressed over Wilkesport being an island, the cemetery flooding and future maintenance cost of the roads and bridges due to the flooding. In December, 1981, the Authority and M.N.R. agreed to pay for a preliminary investigation of the roads and bridges affected by the project. Lethem and Jarvela Engineering Firm of Sarnia was commissioned to prepare this report of Sombra and Lambton County. Terms of reference were established and field examinations were made.

On March 19th, 1982, Ken Jarvela produced his preliminary findings concerning the areas of most concern and general design criteria. He identified eight Township and five County locations, all in Sombra Township that needed upgrading for flooding. The Township requested 100% funding of the upgrading and a haul road agreement to be finished before construction of the dam commenced. By May, 1982, Jarvela had established a cost estimate of the above floodproofing at $1.9 million for the Township and $4 million for the County. In July, 1982, the Authority refused to pay Jarvela's total bill for the preliminary investigation. Then in August, they asked Sombra and Lambton County for a list of priorities since they intended to carry out about $1 million worth of road and bridge work by March, 1983. The list was made. The work was never done.

On November 4th, 1982, the first meeting was held over the proposed haul road to the dam site. The Township wanted a written agreement signed that only the 10th Concession Road between new Highway No. 40 east to Duthil Bridge would be used, that the road would be maintained during dam construction and left in good condition when finished and that the Authority would pay for legal fees incurred because of the said agreement. Authority officials seemed agreeable and suggested that the road would probably be needed during the half load season.

Early in 1983, the Assessment Department dropped the assessment on flood easement lands by 50%, which was a loss of revenue to the Township.

Contract No. 5 (construction of control gates) and Contract No. 6 (construction of control gate housing, control structure, 700 meter earthen dam and operations building) were let in February, 1983 for over $4 million. At a pre-construction meeting in Wallaceburg on February 17th, the contractor told Sombra he would need all the 10th Concession Road from the Kimball Sideroad to the St. Clair Parkway as a haul road and wanted the half load signs lifted immediately. Neither he nor the Authority would sign an agreement. Sombra Reeve, Joe Dedecker, and Deputy Reeve, Bill DeMars, told them they could not use the paved portion of the 10th or the Duthil Bridge and that the half load limit would not be lifted until an agreement was signed.

A Toronto lawyer hired by Sombra Township wrote up a haul road agreement and tried to get the Authority to sign this and an agreement on floodproofing the upstream roads and bridges, but had no success. By March 9th, 1983, the contractor was seen hauling gravel over the 10th Concession Road to the dam site. Council members warned the contractor and the Authority to stop the hauling until the agreement was signed. They had no intention of signing any agreement and wouldn't stop the hauling, so the Council asked for the help of Ministry of Transportation and Communication who immediately stopped the trucks. Not only were they over loaded for the Township roads, for the Provincial Highway No. 40 as well, so they were fined and turned back to London, loaded. The truckers then refused to go to the dam site until the dispute was settled. The Authority still wouldn't sign, but the contractor was interested. However, by April 5th, 1983, a written letter of committment was signed by all parties involved and the load limit was lifted on the 10th Concession Road from the Kimball to Highway No. 40, exclusive of Duthil Bridge. By June, the Authority refused to pay the lawyer's account as was agreed to in the letter and wished to have it taxed. To date, the account hasn't been taxed and the Authority hasn't paid.

On September 12th, 1983, the Township and County were presented with Dillon's Position Paper on upstream roads and bridges for their review. This paper was prepared after studying Jervis's preliminary report. In short, Dillon changed the terms of reference that had been agreed to and left only $321,000 worth of work needed to be done. The Authority also wanted the Township to sign a release form agreeing not to hold the Authority responsible for any future damages. The Township said "No way".

The Township and Authority reached a basic verbal agreement on November 28th, 1983 with both parties backing down somewhat. This went to M.N.R. for approval.

The end of 1983 brought some good news and some bad news for Sombra. M N R officially stated that Sombra would have to pay no more land acquision costs. The bad news came when the Authority voted for Sombra to pay 5% of the Authority share (45%) of all future maintenance costs on the floodway

Today, Sombra Township has a beautiful, expensive dam north of the 10th Concession bridge (Duthil Bridge) 30 feet above normal water level. The dam has a gravel road on top with sodded sides with steel gates and concrete control house. The Authority has developed a $356,000 site plan for this area, which includes a paved road across the crest of the dam, a maintenance road, caretaker residence, interpretive center, implement shed, parking lots, interpretive trail, forest management area, boat launch, rampand dock, agricultural demonstration plot, wetland impoundment area and tree planting along the diversion channel slopes.

Since 1980, the Authority has been gaining some revenue by renting out the berms of the channel for crops and hay and the bottom of the channel for hay only. They also lease the lands they acquired above the dam.

To date the roads and bridges problem has never been settled, the buildings in the floodplain have not been removed, the Wilkesport and Duthil Cemeteries haven't been floodproofed, some landowners haven't been paid and the Township lawyer hasn't been paid for the haul road agreement. Tenders for the demolition of floodplain buildings were let on February 15th, 1984

Yet on February 14th, 1984, with only a draft operating manual to follow the Authority closed the gates for the first time creating a flood above the dam that had never been seen before. The two cemeteries were flooded, the Kimbell Sideroad and County Road 2 were closed as well as Township roads. Water wells were covered and houses outside the floodline were flooded through water back up.

On March 12th 1984 the Authority notified Sombra Township that the Ministry of Natural Resources has no funding available for floodproofing roads and bridges The project has cost the Province over $30 million including legal survey and engineering fees and still isn t finished yet.

CHAPTER THREE

INDUSTRIES IN SOMBRA TOWNSHIP

FORMER INDUSTRIES

When the settlers first came to Sombra Township, the land had to be cleared of trees so they could build their houses and work the land.

Sawmills were set up at many places — Port Lambton, Sombra, Bradshaw and Wilkesport. At first grain was taken to Sarnia to be ground but grist mills soon were set up in Port Lambton, Sombra and Wilkesport. The big grist mill in Sombra Township today is owned by Russ Hazzard at Becher.

The Sicken Lumber Company, located in Sombra Village on the corner of Water and King Streets, was very active in 1910 The Sickens were Marine City residents. They built several houses on King Street east of the highway, in the early 1900's. These houses were all built from the same plan.

There were cheese factories at Becher and Sombra. The Becher factory was owned by J. S. Fraser of Wallaceburg. The cheese maker was Reg Watts of Wallaceburg assisted by Chris Whale of Sombra, and the book-keeper was Mr. Fraser's daughter, Helen Rose, who later married Mr. Herb Burgess. She rode her horse, Barney, back and forth to work. When the factory closed, the building was sold to William Gibbons for a barn. It can be seen on Norman Workman's farm on the Lambton Line at Becher.

The Sombra Cheese Factory was owned by shareholders. In 1881, one share could be bought for $25.00. The president was J. S. Burnham and the secretary was A. A. Knight. In 1886, the president was John H. Soper and the secretary William S. Howell. The cheese maker was Dick Richmond assisted by George Whale.

When the factory closed, Mr. Gordon Dalgety bought the building in July, 1906, and used it for the Thistle Rubber Type Works in the making of rubber stamps.

Sombra Cheese Factory

He was assisted by Raymond Smith, William Duncan, Myrtle Hamilton, Mey Trexler and several employees. Miss Clara Meyers did the office work. The office was over Shepherdson's Store until he bought the cheese factory.

The cheese factory had stood on piers out over the river. Mrs. Dalgety had it moved to her property at the end of St. Clair Street where the road turned and came out to the river. When Highway 40 went through in 1935, the building was moved further east on her property but now facing the new highway where it stands today.

After the death of Mr. Dalgety in 1913, Mrs. Dalgety and Miss Meyers, with the assistance of Bill Duncan, carried on until the elder son, Murray, took over in 1919.

Murray died in 1963, and Morgan carried on, with the assistance of Mrs. Harriet McKillican until the end of 1974 when ill health forced both of them to quit. In 1975, Mrs. Murray Delgety sold the building and contants to Mr. Jim Templeton of Port Lambton

There was a box factory managed by Merk Stover, along the dock west of the Sicken Lumber Company. Here they put paraffin on card board boxes to ship oysters or ice cream

After Mark Stover was killed in a motor accident at Delaware, Ontario, this building was used as a beer scow until rum-running days ended in 1933

In 1936 Harry Stewart bought the building for a barn and Jim Hagen moved it down the ice to its present location on Gordon Stewart's farm along the Snye That's when the River St. Clair really froze over

When the ice in the rivers got to be ten or twelve inches thick, ice cutting was the order of the day. Huge squares of ice were cut and hauled by team and sleigh to the ice house to be covered with the saw dust that was piled up in the yard after the buzz saw had cut up the logs, the men had hauled in for the next year's wood supply.

William Ansell had a Livery and Dray barn on Smith Street. Many people rented horses and buggies before cars became plentiful

J. W. Callaghan was undertaker and embalmer in Sombra on the corner of Water and Smith Streets. He also had a good livery in connection

J. W. Callegham Livery & Undertaking

Tod Hayes was undertaker at Wilkesport until he moved to Sarnia.

Jim Green and Hirem Stover made cement blocks east of the railroad treck in Sombra, about 1905 They made pillars for porches, slabs and small blocks about the size of bricks. In 1906, these blocks were used in the building of the Grend Union Hotel and Joseph Stover's house.

Stover House

Later two other houses were built of these blocks in Sombra

The Sombra Outlook was printed in Sombra from 1908 - 1914 by Harry Moore, who also bought the Courtright Sun

Sombra Outlook

Sandy Campbell had a shoe repair shop in the small building still standing on Smith Street beside Ansell's former livery stable People coming in on the train or crossing the ferry, often rented a horse and buggy from William Ansell to take them to visit relatives in the country

Mr. Sid Helmer and Mr. Lou Reynolds had chicken hatcheries north of Sombra. People from all over the township patronized them.

Sombra clay is slippery and sticky when wet but it has qualities that make it excellent for tile and cement blocks.

The tile factory at Wilkesport started by Harvey Sipprell about 1904 supplied work for many of the young men in this vicinity and supplied tile to drain this wet township. William Bishop bought the tile yard and he and his sons operated it before the boys joined the army. Then John R. Douglas owned it. After Mr. Douglas died, the Ralstons bought it and finally Tom and Bill Colborne. In 1967, they sold the equipment to Emig Clay in Chatham. Then in 1968, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Graham bought the property and raised pigs there. This land was expropriated for the dam and was under high water in 1984 when Wilkesport flooded.

PRESENT INDUSTRIES

LAMBTON PIPE & SUPPLY

When oil was discovered in Sombra Township and oil wells dotted the landscape, Turret Supply opened a centre in Sombra where the old station stood, and supplied pipes and fittings for oil wells. Jim Huctwith, Jim McKenzie, Les Worth, Peter Boeyen and Alfred Henry worked there.

Turret Supply closed in 1965.

In 1971 Lambton Oil and Enterprises Ltd. started their own company with approximately twelve Oil Well Drilling Contractors.

In 1975, Don Lee bought the company and now he and his two sons, David and George operate the business known as Lambton Pipe and Supply.

CHINOOK CHEMICAL

In September, 1965 sod was turned for the Chinook Chemical Plant on Concession 10, Canada's only methylamines plant. It manufactures methanol and ammonia to form three types of amines. Its world-wide customers use these chemicals to produce antibodies and other pharmaceuticals, miniature printed circuit boards for electronics, the wide range of patterns and colours in textiles, sensitizing agents for mining explosives, urethane fabrics and upholstery, weed and insect control products and swimming pool purification products.

It employs 29 local people.

LIQUID CARBONIC

Liquid Carbonic is the world's largest supplier of Carbon Dioxide. This plant, situated at the corner of St. Clair Parkway and Moore-Sombra Townline, is one of the largest plants in Canada and they are planning on expansion. For years they supplied oxygen to the local hospitals.

CANADIAN INDUSTRIES LIMITED

C-I-L — Lambton Works is an integrated chemical fertilizer operation located just south of the Moore-Sombra Townline. The plant itself occupies approximately 400 acres of a 2,000 acre site and manufactures a complete line of nitrogen

fertilizers and some of the phosphate fertilizers. The basic raw material is natural gas from Alberta and this is converted into ammonia in the plant which is rated at over 1,000 metric tonnes per day

One of the unique products manufactured at Lambton Works is sulphur coated urea which is a slow release nitrogen source used in premium quality domestic fertilizers.

A portion of the ammonia is also used to manufacture two grades of ammonium phosphate and as a by-product from this operation they also manufacture hydrofluosilicic acid an agent used in the fluorination of municipal water supplies.

Lambton Works is the base unit of an extensive C-I-L agricultural system which includes a large number of downstream Agro 'Marts". The Agromarts are blending operations supplying custom and mixtures of nitrogen phosphate and potassium for direct sale to the farming community

Initial construction on Lambton Works started in the Fall of 1965 with first product being made early in 1967, at the present time the plant employs approximately 435 people in a wide variety of technical, process and maintenence activities.

EDAPLAST

After World War II, William Dehm started a business in Sombra called "Edaplast". They made photo corners and Scotch tape. After he moved to Ireland, Sombra Welding owned by the Lajoie brothers and Joseph Kennedy, bought the property and employed many local people Sombra Welding went out of business in 1979 Bernard and Marcel Lajoie started up Besomar Manufacturing Co. in the same building The name "Besomar" was made up of the first letters of Bernard, Sombra and Marcel

In 1983, Townsend & Bottum amalgamated with Besomar, and the Besomar Division continued to operate in the same building until the end of December 1983 They now use the building for occasional emergency work only

For years it was the biggest industry in Sombra

CHAPTER FOUR
COMMUNITY LIFE

Early settlers craved the friendship of their neighbours and needed their help Women acted as mid wives because doctors were far away, there were no telephones and it took hours to drive the horse and buggy to summon the doctor

Bees were the order of the day Quilting bees threshing bees and barn-raising bees Every farmer had a wood-bee in the winter. When the buzz-saw moved into the yard, the neighbours came and the sound of the saw told you there would be a big pile of wood in the yard to be chopped for next year's supply

In the fall, there were the cider parties when the young people brought their picnic lunch, put the apples through the cider press and ate their lunch and drank cider out in the Fall sunshine During Fall and Winter there were husking bees in the barn with a good hot supper to follow In the spring the maple syrup was made and they had a sugaring off in the bush.

At barn-raisings, the men chose up sides to see which side would get their frame up first; so they could get to the supper first. The farmer's wife had worked and baked for days getting ready for the horde of hungry men. The neighbouring women and girls all came to help set the tables in the yard and serve supper.

Barn Raising 1918

Ice boating was a great sport on the St. Clair River. The sails on a boat with runners were the power that carried the passengers at a fast rate up and down the river or across the river according to the set of the sail.

Traffic across the ice was heavy with foot passengers, sleighs or cars. After Christmas in Sombra Village, Tom Whitely would collect the used Christmas trees and stake out a safe path to Marine City.

Without radio or television, people made their own entertainment. Sombra had a band and every village or church put on Christmas Concerts or plays after Christmas. Many fine talents showed up in amateur plays.

Sombra had a race track for several years around 1909 on the farm now owned by Gordon Branton.

Ice Boating

At The Races — Sombre

There was also a brass band in the village Some of the members were Amos Henry, George Logan, George and Walter Meyers and L. Burnham

September was often looked forward to in country school sections when a new teacher was coming to the school Many a young teacher married a farmer in the section and so became a good member of that community

In 1933 the Harmsworth races were run on the St. Clair River Many men along the river front bought lumber and erected stands and printed tickets for one dollar per seat, for the hundreds they expected to come and view the races. The visitors came to view the races, parked their cars and walked to the river bank and stood to view the races. Many men had lumber for which they had no use.

SELMAN GRANGE No. 899

This organization was formed in 1886 The members were called Grangers and were Patrons of Husbandry They met in School Section No. 11, then met in Wilkesport Hall.

It was a cross between a lodge and an agricultural society The members were addressed as Brother Henry and Sister Grant. They were a close-knit society, because one entry states: "We the Division Grange of West Lambton having heard the case referred to by Bro. Brown of patrons selling goods to outsiders would strongly recommend that goods bought through the Grange ought not to be sold to outsiders on any terms believing that it was never intended by the Constitution of our Order"

Addresses were given on School taxes, Organization of Farmers and Essay on Gardens.

At every meeting they spoke about lunch which was often a feast of fruit of all kinds.

Some articles in the Constitution "Regular dues shall be ten cents per month for male members, five cents per month for female members and two cents a month for Juniors to be paid quarterly No member shall be entitled to vote or receive the pass-word who is in arrears of dues."

Mrs. David Bowles was 'Flora' among the officers in 1897 John F Rivers and Frank Rivers were members. The members had to be voted on and they were called Co-operators.

The Society's last minutes were recorded in December, 1906 and all money in the Treasury was to be sent to the Treasurer of the Dominion Grange in Toronto.

SOMBRA TOWNSHIP AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY

In the late 1800's a Township Agricultural Society was formed for the purpose of having a fair. The first minute books are missing but the January, 1900 meeting is recorded as being held in Richmond's Hall, Wilkesport. Robert Stokes was president and W. A. Grant was secretary An amusing excerpt from these minutes says the secretary-treasurer's salary will be the same as before or smaller if his conscience so directs.

Directors for the Fair were named and judges named for all classes from horses and cows down to fancy work and fine arts. Many meetings were held in Henry Stokes' Hall Sombra, which was over his store which is now Hargroves. Sarnia, Brigden, Wallaceburg and Sombra were to be canvassed for donations and prizes.

Names of directors in the early years were Henry, Stokes, Green Boothman, Ben Gibbons, Witherell Pretty, Orra Bishop and Alonzo McLean

The June, 1902 minutes names Clara Boothman and Mrs. Maggie Cox as judges. Ben Gibbons — in charge of the hall Alonzo McLean tickets and gate; F. S. Jepp, grounds. Judges were Dr. Stenton, Mrs. Rev Barker and Mrs. A. E Jones. Rent of $10 went to W McGhee

William McRae who lived where Verne Fournie lived, sold the grounds to the fair board. The hall was built and the grandstand later

The January 1903 meeting was in Richmond's Hall

The July 1903 meeting was in Hamilton's Hall. Names appearing this year were Mrs. Walton, Ed Ruttan Robert Payne and Sipprell.

Names in the 1905 minutes were Manley Stubbs, George Shepherdson and Heddle Membership was $1. President Lyman Henry died in March 1905.

In 1906, secretary-treasurer W A Grant's salary was raised from $38 to $45 a year An annual grant was received from Council

In January, 1907, there was a motion to establish fair headquarters at Wilkesport. W A. Grant was delegate to the Western Association of Fairs in Toronto.

1908 lady judges were Mrs. Wes Porter, Becher; Miss Clara Whitely, Sombra

W. A. Granf was secretary-fraasurer from 1900 to 1914, after which Jamea A. Granf of Bickford held that office until Leo McCoy was secretary in 1918

These donors of pnzes in 1917 might be of interest S. D Crotbers, Wallaceburg — $2 00 worth of dry goods, Brander'a Drug Sfore Thos Harrison — cash Cousins & Burlingham — a rocking chair; Merchants Bank of Canada, T D McGuire, John Glendinning, M Gollogly; G E Norman Cousins Bros. Grocery; O'Flynn & Burgess, L. H Burgess resfaurateur — a box of candy; Snively & Sauvey; T L. Johnsfon — a half-dozan photos; Harald Record — ona year's subscription fo fhe paper. T F Hinnegan, Wallaceburg; Bank of Nova Scofia, Brigden L H Burgess also supplied refreshments af fhe fair stands for several years.

In 1917, Mrs. Wm McRae from whom the grounds were bought, was to be inferviewad regarding fapping info her file drain. Apparently nofhing came of it because in 1918 a committee was to see fo draining the grounds. Sid Helmer was to be paid $10 fo plough and smooth the race track.

In 1918, motion was made that Council proclaim Fair Day a public holiday

They also decided fo interview the Aerial Department, Mount Clemens, about having an airplane for Fair Day Nofhing came of it.

Unfortunafely the minufes are missing between 1918 and 1937 At thef fima James H. Granf of Becher was secretary Names are now Bernard Marr, G. M. Deyo, Harman Bicum, Miles Peters.

In March 1943, fhey voted to continue the Fair for the durafion of the War, but an amendment to that motion wes carried and the Fair was discontinued, buf fha Board continued to meet and in 1944, mofion was made fo rent the Fair grounds fo Verne Fournie for fhree years for $40.

In May 1946, af a special meefing, motion was made by Orlo Bicum, seconded by Clayton Workman that since the people are taking no inferest in the Fair or meatings, thaf we dispose of the groundsand assets and close the books. Carried. The fownship now uses the property for gravel trucks and scrapers.

WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

Women's Insfitutes have been a great source of enjoyment and anfertainment fo fha Country Women and they have contribufed much to fheir communities. The first Institufe was formed at Stoney Creek, Ontano by Adelaide Hoodless in 1897 Offshoots of Women's institutes is the 4-H Club and Junior Farmers.

When Lord Tweedsmuir was Governor-General of Canada, 1935 - 1940 his wife, Lady Tweedsmuir, realized that the history of our country was disappearing as fhe older cifizens died so she suggested a worthy project for a worthy group and suggested thaf fhe Women's Institute of every community collect and write the history of that community The Insfitutes agreed and named the histories "Tweedsmuir Hisfories". If was a wise suggestion and today fhe Tweedsmuir Histories are fascinafing and true histories of our communities.

There were Institute organizations at Becher, Wilkesport Port Lambfon, Sombra and Thornyhurst. Tha only active ones remaining in 1984 are Becher and Thornyhurst.

LODGES

There were Orange Lodges formed at Becher and Wilkesport and one in Sombra in 1883. The longest surviving was Becher which had a Ladies' Lodge also, but they both ceased in 1974 and the books were sent to Grand Lodge.

Masonic Lodge was organized in Sombra in 1891, with Henry Roebuck the first Master. Masonic Building was erected in 1903.

Oddfellows Lodge in Sombra was organized in 1908. Gordon Dalgety was the first Noble Grand.

Eastern Star organized in 1909. Mrs. Will Stover was first Worthy Metron. This was the second chapter organized in Ontario. Members had previously attended in Marine City.

Rebekahs organized in 1918. Mrs. Manley Stubbs was the first Noble Grand.

RUM RUNNING

During the Prohibition days in the United States from 1919 - 1933, other boats besides ferries carried on a cross-river business. They operated boat houses or any building close to the river and they were called beer scows. They were stocked with liquor and strung all along the St. Clair from Point Edward to Port Lambton. The liquor came in by train to the stations and was picked up by various men who carried it to the beer scows. Sometimes fictitious names were used to order liquor, even names from cemeteries.

As long as the liquor was exported, Canadian Law was not broken, so many row boats and motor boats left the Canadian shore after dark loaded with liquor presumably for Cuba, but never got further than the American shore.

Floyd McPhail was the owner of a garage in Sombra and he was an excellent mechanic. When a rum-runner had trouble with the engine of his motor boat, he would seek out Floyd for help. Floyd charged his regular patrons 75 cents an hour to fix their cars or tractors, but these big-time rum runners would pay as much as four dollars an hour if he could get that motor running by dark. Floyd loved engines and he said they had some beauties in their boats.

An amusing story is told about a farmer who picked up his order of "booze" at the station and took it up to the corner of the 12th Concession where a boat was waiting. Before he let them unload, he demanded his money. They paid him, unloaded his wagon, then pulled a gun on him and demanded their money back. He went home wiser and poorer, but that ended his purchasing of liquor for the rum-runners.

In 1926, there were thirteen beer scows at Port Lambton. The assessor made a special trip to Port Lambton for the purpose of assessing the beer scows which had been doing business for the four or five previous years without contributing to the Township treasury by way of taxation. One of the village trustees asked the scow owners to contribute toward the upkeep of the roads which were being used to transfer their goods by wagon and truck from the Railroad Station. The idea met with opposition on the grounds that action was up to the County Council as Front Street formed part of the River Road, which was a County Road.

These are a few excerpts from Auld Lang Syne.

May 1926 — The careteker of the Kellner export scow north of Sombra was relieved of $200 in cash and liquor when four masked men entered the scow around midnight, making their getaway in a launch

February, 1928 — The firing of several shots by a couple of "bootleggers" who had been apprehended by the law on the Michigan side and made their escape across the ice to this side sent a hurry-up call to the Provincial Police at Sarnia. Following in pursuit of the bootleggers was a large car occupied by a couple of Port Lambton "temporary Citizens," who were commanded to halt by Officers Scott and Elliot who had quickly arrived on the scene Several shots were fired which fortunately missed their mark. When the Officers found a couple of cases of liquor along the road, north of the village, they were placed in the Officers' car

When the police returned to their car after inspecting certain premises, they found their prize had mysteriously disappeared. One bootlegger after spending the night in a nearby straw-stack walked over the P.M tracks to Sombra. Next day he returned to Port Lambton and while visiting the beer scows along the waterfront was picked up by the police and taken to Sarnia jail

March 1929 — One Saturday night an American Patrol Agent, Earl Roberts, was fatally shot by a bootlegger from Lambton County The shooting took place near Algonac.

When Mr Roberts and another officer attempted to apprehend the man with his boat load of booze, Roberts was shot in the stomach His body crumpled into the boat and its owner sped toward the Canadian Shore with the injured man After dumping the man on a Port Lambton dock, he headed for Sombra. Two men took the wounded officer into Dr Cathcart's office.

After the wounds were attended to, the doctor accompanied the two members of the Michigan Immigration staff to the St. Clair Hospital The wounded man died the next day

UNITED FARMERS OF ONTARIO

In 1919, a United Farmers Of Ontario organized in Kelly's Hall, Sombra, with 31 members. The first President was R A Stokes Secretary U S Cody Their function was to order seed grain, oyster shell, salt meal or fencing or binder twine in large quantities and sell to the members.

They started a U F O picnic in June at Vye's Grove on the 10th Concession. It was beautifully shaded by maple trees and had a field for baseball which was the township's favourite sport People came from miles around, watched the ball games, ate their lunches in the shade of the trees, then prepared to listen to the speeches and concert at night. Bradshaw Port Lambton, Waubuno, Sombra and Thornyhurst ball teams often played.

1925 William Vye was Chairman Mr Ed Armitage, Reeve, was a speaker In 1931, William McNeil was Secretary

Programs consisted of skits by Maurice Minnie and Tom Weir, music by The Brunswick Trio of London, Alice Dunbar and bag-pipes and Scottish Dances with the Henderson Amusement Company

There were races in the afternoon. Some winners' names are Muriel Ansell, Rosane Johnston, Ray Abrams, Rosco Gallarneau Russell McPhail, Jean Ansell and Donald Washburn.

Some names on the ball teams were Clifford Davis Leslie Davis, Morgan Dalgety, Murray Dalgety, Floyd McPhail, Tuffy Davis, Warren Hargrove, Bernard Marr, Jeffries, Shaw, Lumley, Arnold, Rankin Sheppard, Featherstone and Aiken

CHAPTER FIVE
VILLAGES
BECHER

Becher is situated on the North Branch of the Sydenham River on the Lambton Line It was named after Henry Beecher who owned considerable land in the County The second "e" was dropped in the early part of the century

There was a store, Orange Hall, Methodist Church and Anglican Church The school was on the West side of the Sydenham on Duff's farm and the children East of the river had to cross the ferry In 1905, S. S No 26 was built on the corner of 16 Sideroad and S. S No. 13 moved the school to the 10 & 11 Sideroad on George Reid's farm

A hand-powered ferry was discontinued in 1931 when the bridge was built. Everyone had hoped for a bridge at Becher, so finally a delegation from Becher Women's Institute went to County Council and presented their petition. A few years later the bridge was built. Leave it to the women to get things done

A bridge to replace the first one was opened in 1981 when Dean Hunt was Reeve.

The mail was delivered from Wallaceburg and two rural routes went out from Becher Now those routes are all under R. R. No. 5, Wallaceburg

The Ferry — Becher, Ontario

BRADSHAW

A post office named for William Bradshaw, the first postmaster. There was a store, a saw mill, a church and a school. The school is still standing and is the only one in the township being used as a Community Hall.

DUTHIL

Duthil was named after a parish in Invernesshire, Scotland. An early log school was built in 1840. In 1880 the Grant Estate gave land and a Presbyterian Church was built. In 1925, it became a United Church and stood until 1964 when it was sold and torn down. A cairn marks the spot.

Duthil Cemetery is a few rods North of the church grounds.

A general store was across the road, but a large tree that stood in the middle of the road was a real landmark. It was cut down in 1951.

Landmark Tree at Duthil

PORT LAMBTON

Frances Baby from Detroit was the earliest white settler along the river at Port Lambton but the settlement was one mile below Port Lambton which came to be called Baby's Point. At its best it attained a population of 150.

Settlement at Port Lambton definitely began in 1820 when Duncan McDonald of Ohio built on Lot F Concession 7. He erected the first frame house in the township. His son John D. erected a steam mill and became one of the leading businessmen in the Township.

The 1880 record describes Port Lambton as "the liveliest little river town south of Sarnia." It thrived on the lumbering trade because it had two saw mills, a shingle mills, a planing and turning mill a sash door and blind factory and a grist mill all run by steam. A dock 450 feet long ran in front of the village and there was a Custom House, storehouse and warehouses. Serving the 450 inhabitants were eight stores, three hotels — The Grand Central later called the Lambton Exchange and the Morning Star and British Hotel — three liveries, a telegraph office and a school.

There was a daily mail from Sarnia. The Erie & Huron Railway went through in 1886. The Pere Marquette bought the railway in 1902 and sold to Chesapeake and Ohio in 1947. The Ohio Hotel was built in 1907. Frank and Abbie Burgue bought the Washington Hotel in 1943. These hotels are both made into apartments. The Victoria Hotel was torn down in 1961. Ralph Brady built apartments on that spot with stores on the ground floor.

In the 1920's on the river side across from the Victoria Hotel was the Dansmere — a dance pavilion used for weekly dances in the summer and sometimes used as a hall for concerts. The White Star Line Dock was just south of the Dansmere.

Many are the excursions that went from the White Star Line Dock to Tashmoo Park. Excursion boats were Tashmoo, Wauketa, City of Toledo and the Greyhound. Mr. William Hinnegen was Customs Officer.

White Star Line Dock — Port Lambton — 1924

During the season, picnics sponsored by Sunday Schools, lodges, and bands ran one or two excursions a week and twelve hundred people were a normal crowd. It was a full day's pleasure jaunt — 35 miles downstream, six hours of fun at Tashmoo Park and 35 miles back, all for the modest price of 50 cents for adults and 25 cents for children. Sunday Schools got special rates, enabling them to take the children for 15 cents and still leave a margin for prizes for sports.

Around 1950, the Gordon-Fox Products had a manufacturing business making padlocks of various types. When this business ceased, the Port Lambton Wood Products made wooden articles such as toys and drawer handles until the building burned in 1954.

Reedy and Cain had a hardware and lumber company from 1914 to 1971.

In 1950 Port Lambton Community Hall was built in memory of soldiers in both World Wars. The Roman Catholic Parish Hall was built in 1954.

Dan McEvoy was named Fire Chief in 1948 when the Fire Protection Committee was first formed in Port Lambton. He held that position until 1983, when he resigned. The township put on a dinner and he was presented with a 35-year plaque from the Fire Area.

Before this, Dan had received a 30-year long-service medal from the Ontario Fire Marshall's office. Tom McEvoy and Gordon Atkins have also received their 30-year long-service medals.

January, 1976 — worst ice jam in years.

March, 1976 — worst ice storm causing broken power lines, falling trees, telephone lines. Power off in some locations for days, causing people to be without heat and water.

1976 — heaviest snow storm.

1976 — a replica of Columbus' Santa Maria went up the river.

These excerpts are from the Port Lambton Tweedsmuir History.

PORT LAMBTON 1895

Its Popularity — as a summer resort. Its Probabilities, Its Possibilities and Its Businessmen.

Nestling cosily on the western shore of the wide smooth running river St. Clair, some 25 miles south of Sarnia and a few miles north of Lake St. Clair the little village of Port Lambton is found on the map. Unpretentious in appearance modest yet enterprising in the character of its inhabitants, it is withall the Eldorado of the metropolitan citizen, who in the sweltering weather of July and August seeks some sylvan retreat where cool and balmy breezes fan the fevered cheek and rest the business racked brain. All over the country its praises are sounded as a summer resort, and during recent years the people who every summer flock to some resort where there is immunity from dust, smoke, turmoil and bustle of commercial centres, are looking to Port Lambton as the best adapted to fill the requirements of summer boarders and the disposal of lots for summer cottages increases each season.

An advantage peculiar to Port Lambton is the fact that it is so situated that the prevailing south west winds of the summer season are tempered in their course over fifteen miles of water before they reach the shore, and the temperature in summer is invariably about twenty degrees lower than on the opposite side of the river. Another thing which makes the place attractive is the bathing, boating and fishing, the latter is especially enticing to the disciples of Isaac Walt, who can dangle their legs off the dock and haul in pickerel, bass, perch and other members

of the finny tribe, while enjoying one of Peter Forbes best cigars. As a summer resort Port Lambton stands high and in a few years will undoubtedly be the most popular in southern Canada. Of the early history of the place but a brief outline can be given here gethered as it were from one or two of the old settlers, chief among whom is Mr. J. P. Merritt, a descandant of good old U. E. Loyalist stock, who recounted to the Herald representative many of the things he remembers of the old days.

Away back in the twenties a surveyor by the name of Rankin, who owned land here which he obtained by patent from the Crown, made the first survey, but it was not until in the forties that other settlers made their appearances, when J. D. McDonald, P. J. Merritt and Angus McDonald came in and took up some land, the McDonald's being first. It was a wild country then with neither clearings nor roads, and the two or three settlers fished, cleared the land and waited development which came slowly.

In 1850, Phillip Donnelly made the survay for the village, laid out 10 acres — 5 acres each from the property of John D. McDonald and John More McDonald, — marked it off in lots, the first of which was purchased by Mr. P. J. Merriff and located where Mr. William McDonald's store now stands, shortly after Sydney Cook came from Ohio and purchased a lot. He erected the first frame house in the still sparse settlement. Cook worked on J. D. McDonald's farm, clearing land and cutting cord wood and afterwards appointed the first constable of the district.

It was about 1850 that municipal organization was established and a post office was opened at Baby's Point, south of where Port Lambton is situated. Among the first councillors of the township was Mr. Merritt and in 1851 when Municipality was divided into wards he represented Ward No. 1, which included the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth and part of the ninth concessions but the whole ward only numbered 28 votes.

When the Post Office was opened at Baby's Point the name of Lambton was suggested but there being 2 other offices of that name, Baby's Point was given it by the department with William Henderson as postmaster and this continued to be the post office for the district until early in the seventies when an office was opened at Port Lambton although Baby's Point office continued in existence until a few years ago, when the Port began to assume at least some importance in the geography and commerce of the county that was originally intended by those who sanctioned the survey of Lambton Lots, although it was not until the sixties that the faintest hope of the originators began to be realized. About that time a man by the name of Kelly opened a hotel and accommodated his few patrons with lodging and meals and refreshments, but the rent for his rooms and the wear and tear of his chamber linen was limited in extent.

The first store was opened by Messrs. Merritt and McDonald, who carried a general stock, such as was adapted to the modest requirements of the yet sparse population, and of the men whom they employed in their timber and wood operation. The next merchantile establishment was opened by James Henderson and he was followed by a man named Briggs, who came from Belleville and opened up a hardware store. Saw mills erected by Mr. Merritt and by Stoddard and Soule were added to the industries but the timber having been depleted, these were some years ago added to the annals of the past.

In April 1867, the Methodist Church was opened and Rev. Dr. Marks was the first pastor, his membership at the time of the inauguration numbering around twelve. About fifteen years ago the Catholic church was established here and these two places of worship continued to be the only religious edifices in the place.

The flour mills, erected some years ago by Mr. J. D. McDonald, for a while did a good business, but its wheels are now hushed in silence, though the somewhat imposing building still stands as a monument to thrift and enterprise.

Many incidents and anecdotal illustrations of early times and the lives of the pioneers might be given did space permit, but as a newspaper sketch only a brief outline can be given. Yet it is sufficient to recall old memories of those who tilled the ground in that unbroken wilderness and by the strength of their arm and indomitable will hewed for themselves a life in the forest where Indians and the wild game had for centuries been in undisputed possession.

It is of the present that the Herald wishes to deal believing that there is a future which will make Port Lambton as famous as the renowned Saratoga, Long Branch, Orchard Beach and other hot weather resorts. These facts are related for the good which may come of their dissemination as has already been mentioned, the writer knows of no place so admirably situated as this is for which it is inevitably destined to become — the favorite summer resort of Western Ontario. Brains, capital, enterprise are the three essentials necessary, and if brains and enterprise are judiciously used, the other factor will be easily interested. The late Dr. Tye of Chatham was one of the first to realize the advantages of the place, and demonstrated his appreciation in the purchase of property and the erection of a summer residence which he enjoyed most thoroughly. He used to say it was the finest place in Canada for a sanitorium or invalid's home, and it was his ambition to see such an institution established here, but has plans were never sufficiently matured to put into practical operation.

Considerable enterprise is manifested by the present citizens, who are fully alive to the advantages they posses and with keen appreciation of the almighty dollar, they are alert, each one in his own business, to see that none of the necessary commodities which can be legitimately directed to their coffers, escape. Principle among the firms, who uphold the honor of Port Lambton are the following.

O'Leary and Downe

This firm is composed of Mr. James O'Leary and George Downs and they transact the most extensive business in Port Lambton dealing in timber, cordwood, grain, etc. besides carrying on extensive farming operations. Both members of the firm may be termed what is now adey known as hustlers in turning the nimble sixpence and making them count into dollars. During the past winter at their camps in Dover and Sombre they took out nearly two million feet of stave timber, which finds a ready market at Fairhaven and New Baltimore Mich., and besides this large quantity of railway ties, ship lumber and cordwood have been put into marketable shape. The railway ties are supplied to the Grand Trunk, cordwood goes to Detroit and Port Huron and the ship's lumber to Marine City. To handle the stuff and run the farms between fifty and sixty men are employed during the winter months and about twenty-five during the summer months to attend to the rafting.

towing efc. in which the fug "Sewell" and barge "Relief" are used, the letter in the trensport of cordwood Lesf season they handled about sixfy thousand bushels of wheef, oafs, corn and barley ef fheir two werehouses, situefed at the dock and the Erie end Huron Station. Two larme of one hundred and four hundred acres each are owned in Sombra and another of three hundred in Dawn. These ere being cleared up end put under cultivation es fast es the timer is removed with the intenfion of going extenaively into stock raising, and as the firm enjoys fhe reputation oi making a success of whefever they undertake sfock farming will undoubtedly be mede to pay. In November last the firm susfained a severe loss in fhe desfruction by fire of the International Hofel but they have faith enough in the edventages and prospecfs of Port Lambton to rebuild, provided they can find an experienced hotel manager who will fake stock in a syndicate and under take fhe management of the institufion The village has much fo fhank Messrs. O'Leary end Downs for, and the present popularity of the place is largely due to their exfensive business operations and influences. Long may they confinue to shed fheir influencing power over end around us

SOMBRA

In May 1812, Samuel Burnham end Abrahem Smifh came from Syracuse, New York and settled along fhe St. Clair River. The Burnhems fook up land from fhe John Burnham farm on the corner of the 9th Concession fo fhe 10fh Concession where Mrs. Welter Burnham now lives. Samuel Burnham bought 400 ecres at 25 cents en acre. The Smith femily took up land from Maunce Minnie's corner North Thef is how fhe Smith Line got its name. The first log houee builf by Sam Burnhem was on the spof where Herry Bernes' house etands.

They came in May end the amount of work fo be done that summer to provide shelter for the femily before winter came, kepf them all busy working early and late. Trees had to be felled and a log house bulit, besides providing food for fhe winter months. The woods were filled with all kinds of fruit end there wasn t e blighf for everything thaf grew in those deys. There was plenty of honey, foo, but all they had to do with, were fheir own two hends and their ingenuity. To save fruit, they hollowed out a block of hardwood puf the fruit in covered if with honey end then sealed if wifh beeswax. Imegine if you started to can fruit wifhout sealers or sugar

In the book, "Lambton Counfy's Hundred Years" by Vicfor Launsfon it states fhet Burnhems and Smiths settled here in 1821 buf that is when fhe registry office opened in Sarnie end of course thet is fhe first record fhe county would have when people registered fheir deeds.

Meanwhile meny femilies hed come in, boughf their lend end cleared it. Grad ually lumber was being demoted from its firstplace position as an industry and ierming was taking over fhe top spot

Wallace Mey hed a blacksmith shop out in front of Allen Hargrove's property William Hamilton had a wagon shop ouf over the wate r just north of fhe bleckamith shop

The first school was built around 1820 It had benches for the children to sit on. This was a log building end was destroyed by fire around 1881 A two-room frame building wes bulit the nexf year in 1882 Jennie Cruikshenk of Strafhroy came to the village to teach Music and she was prevailed upon to teach in the Junior room unfil she married Wil Stover in 1885

They were looking for another teacher and they asked Hattie Whitely She said how could she teach but Mrs Mrs Stover said "You can read and multiply, can't you?' Miss Whitely was hired and received $8.50 a month None of these ladies had model school training, but taught the children what they had learned at school. In 1886 Miss Eva Green was teacher in the Junior room and the principal was D D Mosher, who later became Inspector of Public Schools.

In 1854, Sombra was under the St. Clair Mission At the corner of Moore Townline and the River Road was the Reynolds Methodist Church There was a Wesleyan Methodist Church on the lot where Clifford Shephard lives. In 1875 a Methodist Church was built on John Street.

In 1883 a Presbyterian Church was built for $1,302 00. This is the building where the United Church people meet now The first Anglican Church was built on land where Riverside Cemetery is, but that Church burned, so land was obtained from George Ramsay and his wife Jane. Trinity Anglican Church was built on the corner of John Street about 1871

Dr Frank Seager, uncle of Bishop Seager was warden of the church about 1876, also William Watson and Alexander Meyers

The history of St. John's R C Church was written by Maxine Davin and may be seen in Sombra Museum

Doctors were Seager, Campbell M McDonald and William Cathcart.

A drug store stood on the corner of King and Water Streets, just north of Kelly and Hughes Store.

George Logan had a tailor shop on the corner of King and St Clair When he became a Customs Officer he sold the business and the Sterling Bank moved into the building. A gas explosion on December 25, 1920 razed the building

In November 1883, the "Valley Record" of Wallaceburg said— Mr N Cornwall is opening a Boot and Shoe Shop on Front Street, first door north of Weybrant's Hotel.

The village had a water pumping system just south of Sickens Lumber, but water was never pumped on Sundays or nights.

Water Tower, Sicken Lumber Company — Sombra, 1910

Sombra had a Chamber of Commerce organization. Their most noted activity was building the Community Hall in 1957. William Anderson, school principal, was President at the time and devoted much energy to it, but it was Frank Kellam who spent so much time and labour on it along with many other men of the community.

A Historical Society was formed in November, 1957 aiming to open a Museum in the township. They bought the former John Bury house. In 1881 that lot had cost $50 and it was 100 by 200'.

After much labour by the men and cleaning and papering by the women it opened in June, 1959. Frank Kellam and Gordon Branton were very active in plastering, cement work, and general renovations. Very active workers in the beginning were Mrs. Eunice Henry, Mrs. Archie Highfield, Mr. and Mrs. Rae Grant, Mrs. Morgan Dalgety, Mrs. Flo Rivard, Mrs. Ernest Bradley, Mrs. Mary Shoemaker, Mrs. Harold Gurd and Miss Kate Hamilton.

Today it is a great tourist attraction.

On John Street, Wilfred Johnston had hay and coal sheds and a cooperage shed. There were two elevators and stock yards along the railroad track.

There were two Imperial Oil Tanks and Louis Reynolds delivered truck loads of oil with his team of horses to various stores.

There used to be three grocery stores, a restaurant, a drug store, a meat market, a millinery store, a bake shop, 2 hotels, a barber shop, 3 service stations and Floyd McPhail's Garage. In 1984 there is a Pic' N Pay Variety Store, no barber shop, no service stations and Floyd's Garage was bought by Baker Transit Parts who enlarged the building. There is a large restaurant which is very popular and a large library.

On May 11, 1984 an era ended in Sombra when Warren Hargrove died. His father William Hargrove had bought the General Store from W. C. Curtis in February 1904. In 1916 Charles Doan became a partner and the store was known as Hargrove and Doan. After World War II, Warren came in as a partner. In 1955 Charlie Doan retired and William Hargrove died in 1965.

The community and the church lost a valued member in the passing of Warren Hargrove.

THORNYHURST

Thornyhurst was named after one of the first settlers by the name of Thornbury who built the first frame house which is on the McNeil farm. There was already a Thornbury post office so it was named "Thornyhurst". The first post office was in this house. Mr. Thomas Browning became post master and had the office in his house on Lot 6 Concession 9. Mr. Fred Varndell carried the mail from Wallaceburg by horse and buggy by way of Becher and Duthil, and dropping off mail twice a week at Brownings. The post office closed in 1912, so Thornyhurst then had rural delivery from Sombra.

Thornyhurst school is still standing but has been closed since 1964.

WILKESPORT

In 1868 Wilkesport was the head of nevigation on the Sydenham River end was nemed efter the Wilkes Brothers who were lumber dealers. It was e thriving hemlet ot three hotels, three generel stores, three blacksmith shops, one grist mill, one saw mill, one water power mill, one shoe store, one turniture store, one harness shop, one butcher shop, one jail.

Three steamers, the "Silver Spray", "The Heney", and the "Manitobe", e passenger boat plied the Sydenham The "Menitoba" mede weekly trips to Walleceburg

Four captains, Cook, Cranston, Crane end Kidd settled along the North Brench of the Sydenham

Sailing boats loaded with white timer averaged from torty to sixty teet in length Red Oak timber was shipped to the West Indies, to make rum barrels.

Elm was used to meke tlour barrels. One ot the largest elm trees cut along the North Branch measured eight teet across at the butt. Cord wood was shipped to Detroit tor tuel.

Boats hed to be pulled upstream by oxen and man power There were several banking grounds where refts were made Timber was hauled over a rell road, with wooden rails running trom Becher to near Florence

In 1892 logs were jammed to the boftom ot the river trom Becher to Wallaceburg, causing severe flooding

Professor Fred Landon, of Western University spent many summers in Sombra and wrote articles for the London Free Press. This article is entitled "Venished Portion of Lambton County"

Onterio has many venished villages end vanished ports as wall, but you do not expect to tind e vanished port six or seven miles inlend trom a navigable body ol weter That is whet makes Wilkesport in Lambton County out of the ordinary. We drove in trom the St. Clair River not quite sure where the village ley and coming to e store asked how far it was to Wilkesport "You ere in Wilkesport now" was the answer of the storekeeper

There is not much visible today to recall this once busy lumbering centre where some of the tinest lumber in Western Ontario was cut end where actually something in the way ot ship building wes ettempted. Every sign ot this has passed awey end the once thickly wooded erea is now definitely in need ot reforestration

Black Creek end the Sydenhem River join here to produce the stream that moves sluggishly through grain tields toward the St. Clair Today it will bear nothing more then e good size rowboat but plainly it wes e much larger stream 75 years ego.

Tradition says thet the tirst settler in this area wes e Peul Sturdevent, en emigrent trom New York State. A tombetone records that he was born in 1804 in New York Stete end that he died at the age ot ninety, e herdy old pioneer indeed. But elso buried neer by ere Hiram Sturdevent who died in 1887, eged 52 end his wite Dorcas (Selman), who died in 1854, eged 21

The original Sturdevant is said to have arrived in 1830, to be followed a year later by one Hamlet Sales. About 1840, John Wilkes came from Brantford and established a mill, thereby making the settlement a piece of business. He acquired considerable land and in due time the settlement took his name. But that was a long time ago and there is no stone in the cemetery today recording anyone by the name of Wilkes.

The little cemetery perches on what was the high bank of the river at a time when the stream was many times larger than it is today. There are probably many early burials for which no stone was ever erected. It was not easy in the pioneer era to procure a stone and any temporary marker soon disappeared. This makes it sometimes difficult to identify the first settlers whose names are handed on only in tradition. But from such stones as are to be found much may be learned about the beginnings of a community.

As might be expected in an area contiguous to the St. Clair River there are sailors buried here. Captain James H. Rathburn, 1883 - 1940 was with the Reiss Steamship Line for many years. His last command was the "A. M. Byers" and he also sailed the "John A. Kling" and the "Charles C. West" of the same fleet. Captain John Stover, 1867 - 1916 was a well known skipper from these parts. He was with the "Hutchinson" fleet out of Cleveland at various times. It is recalled that he was on Lake Huron on the ninth of November, 1913, when the most violent storm ever recorded broke over that lake sending nine ships and 78 sailors to their deaths. he managed to bring his ship into shelter at Manitoulin Island and thus survived the storm.

The Sydenham was navigable for small craft as far as Wilkesport. Logs were towed on rafts to Wallaceburg and gravel was brought to the north side of the 7th Concession road. When the bridge was built at Becher in 1931 it stopped all navigation north.

There were docks at every concession road and in the winter men cut cord wood and hauled it to these docks and piled it along the road. In the summer it was put on the docks and sold to wood burning steamers and also for shipment to a city.

As the township was cleared and the steamers used other means of fuel supply, the docks gradually disappeared.

Sugar beets were hauled down the Sydenham to the sugar factory in Wallaceburg.

When Imperial Oil was sending men from Canada to work in their oil fields in South America Eldon Fournie of Wilkesport went as a pipe fitter and plumber. He sailed from New York on Christmas Eve 1920 went through the Panama Canal to Peru where he worked for three years and four months. He learned to speak Spanish. After Peru, he was in Colombia for one year.

In 1900, George Tyrrell joined the gold rush and went to the Klondike for seven years. After not finding gold he came back to Vancouver, then went to San Francisco and worked as a carpenter rebuilding San Francisco, after the earthquake.

Wilkesport, Ontario

WILKESPORT COMMUNITY CENTRES

On October 30, 1963, several people from the Wilkesport community pledged an average of $10.00 each to purchase the old Wilkesport School. By April 10, 1964, the deed was approved and the Wilkesport Community Centre Club was formed with Trustees Cyril Salisbury, Harry Burgess, Gerald Shepherd and Roy Sheffer in charge. The secretary-treasurer was Elaine Salisbury.

The hall was used mainly for euchre parties, Church functions, banquets, Hallowe'en parties and the odd bingo. Revenue was received through the euchre parties and rentals which were $7.00 a night or for a Church function or $10.00 a day. Some minor renovations were done to create a stage and kitchen. The first Wilkesport picnic and parade began in July, 1972 with local people donating food for the meal.

The local people decided that in order to benefit from government grants, they should turn the hall over th Sombra Township; so on June 16, 1973, Council moved that they accept the deed of the Wilkesport Community Hall and that a bylaw be prepared to make this hall into a Community Centre under the Community Centres Act and a Board of Directors be appointed to assume the responsibility of management and control of the centre. The deed was registered in the Township's name on July 11, 1973. The first board was George Douglas (Chairman), Alex Lecky, Bruce Jackson, Lorne Johnston (Council) and Dean Hunt (Council) with Ann Douglas (Secretary-treasurer).

Various events carried on with the addition of funerals, showers, elections and teen dances. A small ball diamond was built and the Board made plans to renovate and enlarge the hall. However, at the annual meeting in March, 1975, they decided there wasn't enough local support for the renovations. In July, 1975, the first pig roast was added to the picnic.

On January 8, 1976, the Board, with the support of the people, decided to look into buying more land and putting up a new hall. Several fund raising events were held, such as six dances at Courtright Hall, street dances, canoe races as an addition to the picnic and a 50/50 draw. In March, 1976, the Board started proceedings to buy 12 acres of property from Gerald Shepherd. A severance was applied for and approved and a fence built around the severed portion. The deed was officially transferred to Sombra Township on November 30, 1976.

In February, 1977, Council asked the Board to look into a 300 people capacity hall rather than the proposed larger one, but at the annual meeting on March 10, 1977, the people voted to go for the 500 people capacity hall. This Board consisting of Paul Graham (Chairman), George Douglas, Alex Lecky, Jim Duffy, Bill Castaldi, Dean Hunt (Council) with Margaret Dawson (Treasurer) and Helen Pretty (Secretary) spearheaded the building of the new hall.

Fund raising efforts continued through 1977 and 1978 with raffles of quilts, beef, tarpaulin, title, Christmas Teddy Bear, leather purse, sink-the-car, 50/50 draws, millionaire-for-a day draw, auction sale, skat-a-thon, demolition derbys, tractor pulls, Courtright dances, street dances, CHOK hockey ball games, student's Good Friday car wash, snowmobile races, horse ride-a-thon and a door-to-door canvas. Labour, machinery, material and money were donated by hundreds of people and companies in and out of the Township.

Land levelling, tiling, parking lot and three ball diamonds were finished in these years. Brownies, Guides, Pathfinders, Cubs and Scouts started.

In July, 1977, a 25% grant for the land purchase was received from the Ministry of Culture and Recreation. After checking out several tenders, the Board recommended to Council that Tristruction be given the contract for the new hall at a cost of $205,000. In August, 1978, Tristructure declared bankruptcy and Bernies Building Systems were given conditional approval to build the hall on September 11, 1978. The sod-turning took place in October, 1978, and the hall was officially opened on March 10, 1979 with 500 people attending.

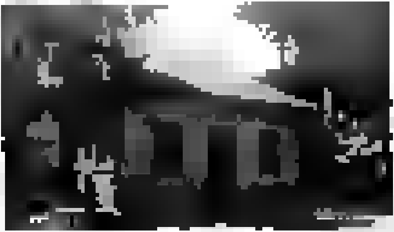
In 1980, the old hall and property were sold to Terry McLaughlin.

A Light Fund Committee, under Dick and Pat Swain, was started in May, 1983.

In 1984, the debenture was paid off.

A HISTORY OF SOMBRA TOWNSHIP

TABLE OF CONTENTS



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CAPITAL TEN

THE TENANT MANUAL

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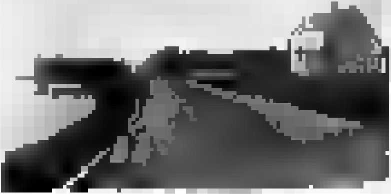

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CHAPTER FOUR
COMMUNITY LIFE

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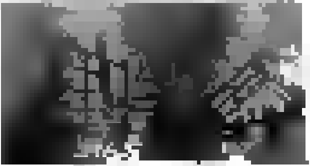

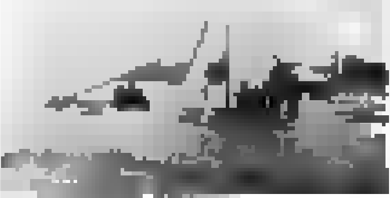

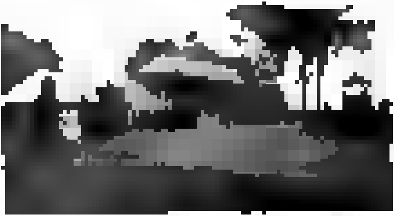

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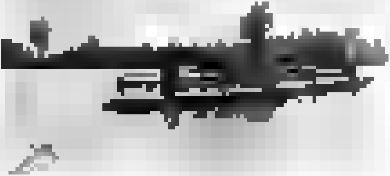

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ABSTRACT

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